A Song In Emerald

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A Song In Emerald

by Arkhaniel

Summary

Adam Raki never thought he would one day leave the comfort of his routines to embark on a personal journey on the Spanish coast to visit his cousin. Between self discovery and dangerous secrets, his meeting with the charming yet enigmatic Nigel will change his vision of the world even if he might not be ready to acknowledge it.

Notes

Hello! I finally decided to write what have been on my mind for a long time.
The story takes place after the events that happened in the films Adam and The Necessary Death of Charlie Countryman. Nigel was not shot and decided instead to solve his problem a little more violently than the canon ending. Will ran away with Hannibal at the end of season 2 before Mizumono.
It's roughly based on Lovecraft Mythos and his eldritch gods, but I have adapted the lore to fit the plot. I will put some materials with the last chapter if you are interested about knowing more.

The story is finished and will be posted regularly. The number of chapters may change.

Please tell me what you think, kudos and comments give me motivation!
Thank you for reading :)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Plop, plop, plop

A woman's voice was announcing, in English, that the flight number YN511 was about to depart, and that all passengers should make their way to the departure gate. People were hurrying to their destinations; the sound of their shoes and the shuffling of their luggage reverberating off the airport walls. A plane was taking off in the distance. A steward made an announcement in what was probably Spanish for the third time in five minutes.

Plop, plop, plop

Everything was so loud, and there were so many people, and he was so very tired. Anyone would be; after two straight days of travel and four different flights.

His head hurt. The buzzing in his ears seemed to get louder and louder the longer he sat. Sweat was pooling on every inch of his body. his skin felt too tight under clothes that were too warm for the Spanish weather.

The young man's gaze was fixed on the digital arrival's board in front of him, where numbers and letters seemed to overlap each other.

Ten minutes ago, a cleaning lady had left her mop hanging on the side of the bucket she used to clean up the mess a sick passenger had made on the floor just a few feet from him. The stench was still present in the warm air, and the dripping of the mop on the flagstone was too loud- even in the surrounding cacophony.

He took a calming breath, and another quickly after. The fingers of his right hand tightened against his jeans, turning the knuckles white. He shut his eyes, and saw numbers flying in the darkness.

Plop, plop-

There was a loud splash followed by a chilling sound, like a shout in a sharp and guttural language.

Adam looked up but couldn't see the origin of the noise. Everything was exactly the same around him.

Maybe he fell asleep for a second there?

Someone was calling his name in the distance, and then again directly in front of him.

"Adam! Here you are! I am so sorry I'm late, there was an accident on the highway. Did you get my text?"

He knew that voice. It should have calmed him down like it used to, but this time it didn't.

"You are late Will, very late!" he exclaimed, blinking angrily at his cousin. "You promised you would be here early, so I wouldn't have to wait at all!"

The look of utter regret and anguish on his cousin's face managed to calm Adam down a little. Will bent down to look him in the eye and took his closed fists in his hands, rubbing them soothingly. "I know, and I am so sorry. I hadn't meant to pick you up so late. You must be so tired. I'll make it up to you, I promise," he said softly, standing up to take Adam's bags from the seat next to him. "Let's go to my car, it's very close to the entrance. You can sleep on the way if you want."

Standing up on unsteady legs, Adam followed Will to his car- a fancy grey Range Rover that didn't look like something his cousin would buy. He quickly found shelter from the biting sun in the passenger seat, breathing in relief that the air was still cool from the AC Will had turned off just a few minutes ago.

"The local guidebook I read before departing said that the weather here is relatively temperate in June. I didn't think it would be this warm. I'm sweating and everything feels sticky," he complained, fastening his seat belt with trembling hands while Will sat behind the wheel and started the car.

"Yeah it wasn't supposed to be like this. We have an unexpected heat wave coming in from Africa, so it should be warmer than usual during the next few days." His cousin looked at him with a frown as he noticed his jeans and long sleeved brown shirt. "We can buy you lighter clothes tomorrow. If you want."

The ride took about an hour. Adam was drifting off while looking at the rough landscape of Galicia, finally able to relax in the calm atmosphere of the car. They didn't talk. Will could still sense that Adam was distressed from a very long and noisy journey.

Even though it had been a long time since they had seen one another in person, Will and Adam were very relaxed in each other's presence. They were each attuned enough to the other's needs and personality to know when to push, and when to let it go. They hadn't been in contact much since Adam moved to California to work at the observatory two years ago. There were occasional phone calls, which Adam disliked only slightly less than phone calls with anyone else, and emails, but that was all.

After two years of taking no more than a day or two off for the occasional holiday, and months of Will's increasing insistence, Adam finally managed to ask his boss for three weeks off to visit his cousin in the province of A Coruña, in Spain. He had never travelled so far away from home, and it had taken a lot of convincing, and a lot of sleepless nights, to finally make the decision to come.

Will knew how difficult it was for Adam to manage so much travel all by himself.

He looked fondly at the sleepy form against the window, and was surprised to see how much his cousin had changed since the last time he saw him. He still looked the same on the outside- clean shaven, with his short dark curls falling gently on his forehead. Still just as

pale and thin as he used to be. But under the feeble appearance, Adam seemed stronger. Bolder than before, and more in control.

Will has always thought of himself as Adam's slightly overprotective brother. After all, he knew just how easily the darkness that lurks in the corners of this world could abuse an innocent soul like Adam. A world where his differences were distastefully called a disorder, or a condition- something that, like a disease, must have a cure. All by people who had never bothered to take the time to understand what it was they were labelling.

The road they were on climbed up along a rocky edge. It overlooked small groves of pine trees, several little white houses, and beyond them- the ocean; lazily licking the rough edges of the Atlantic coast, and forming the quiet bay of Quimas.

Will tightened his grip on the wheel, and pressed his lips together in a tight smile that didn't reach his eyes.

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The house was huge, isolated from the nearby city on the flank of a little hill. Grey walls surrounded by a limestone terrace, hiding from view by a canopy of trees. A little path ahead of the house led to a private beach enclosed by rocks and moss.

Adam was led to a guest room with a beautiful view of the ocean from the second floor. A door inside the bedroom led directly to a little bathroom who looked new and unused. The room was simple yet tasteful and smelled faintly of the sea with lack of synthetic and aggressive smells which he was grateful for.
The clock on the nightstand indicated 5.14 pm. It was too early to take a shower but Adam forced himself to do it anyway, eager to get the long journey off his skin.

Cleaned and redressed in beige shorts and a dark blue polo, he looked wearily at the space around him. There was an empty closet with plenty of room for his clothes but the unfamiliarity of the room made him uncomfortable.

What should he do now? Despite the size of the house he felt trapped and ill at ease. Everything was new and intimidating. Adam was tired but it was too early to sleep, so he took the travel guide he had already finished from his bag, sat on the bed and read it again, tapping a monotone rhythm with the pad of a finger on the page.

He missed the observatory, the changing blue shade of a white dwarf or the binary system of Sirius in his favourite astronomy book. He recalled each of them by memory, the ones from the book and the ones he would see during a clear night with his telescope, writing down each single alteration or discovery, even the most singular of them. Lost in his cosmic contemplation he didn't heard the knock on the door and got startled when the head of his cousin appeared through the half opened door.

"Hey, sorry to startle you. Hannibal is home and we thought we could have a drink to welcome you here. Are you fine with it? We should eat at seven a clock. Hannibal is making a light Spanish dish for us and macaroni and cheese for you."

Adam nodded with a smile, pleased at the prospect of eating something familiar. He also felt a little tensed at the mention of Hannibal. He have never met his cousin's husband but have heard of him several times since the two of them left the US to travel around Europa before settling down here just over a year ago. He seemed to make his cousin happy but the way Will was mentioning him sometimes made him feel a but uneasy.

When they reached the ground floor and entered a cosy study with a dark cream sofa and wooden furniture, Adam gaze came upon dark golden eyes that looked intensely at him as if the man wanted to dissect each part of him. The uneasiness amplified tenfold forcing Adam to take a step back until he felt the calming presence of Will behind him.

Hannibal's features softened upon seeing it in an almost apologetically smile, eyes still shinning slightly in an enigmatic way that Adam couldn't understand.

"Adam," he said kindly, approaching the pair while still maintaining a respectful distance, "it is a pleasure to finally meet you." He bowed his head slightly, still looking imposing and perfectly at ease in his Burgundy plaid suit and black shirt that enlightened his high cheek bones and greyish blond hair. "Will told me quite a lot about you. Welcome in the land of the Galicians, I hope you had a good travel despite the unpleasantness expected for such a long journey."

"P- pleasure to meet you too," replied Adam with a quivering voice, "and hum thank you for letting me stay in your home. That's very generous of you." The last part was ushered a little too quickly and in a monotone tone that led no doubts that it was something Adam had repeated inside his head for the last days before the meeting.

Smiling again Hannibal directed him to take a seat on the sofa with an elegant movement of his arm while unbuttoning his suit jacket, sitting himself adjacent from Adam and Will.

"Your gratitude is well appreciated but not necessary as we are very glad to have you with us during the next weeks," Hannibal answered, giving a secretive look to his husband who returned it while filling their glass, "I hope you will be comfortable here. Please let us know if you need anything. Family is very important to me and as Will gave me the immense honour to become my husband you are by extension a part of my own family too and I am looking forward to know you more." Raising his glass of red wine to lightly cling it against Will's tumbler of whiskey and Adam's glass of orange juice, he took a sip, the same enigmatic glint in his eyes.

Acknowledging his host reply with a little nod of his head, Adam barely followed the conversation going back and forth between Will and Hannibal about the most interesting places to show Adam the following days.
His eyes were converging around the room, from the row of foreign books on the higher shelves of the wooden bookcase to the crystal decanter on the table in front of him. His attention was particularly taken by a strange little statue on a desk next to the empty fireplace. It was dark brown, showing a sort of mythological display, with two monsters fighting each other. The lines were so complex and intertwined that it was difficult to distinguish the shape of them other that they didn't looked humanoid at all. Above their strange forms were two shaped-like planets and a large circle that surrounded the whole scene, a little like Saturn's rings, with strange markings on it, like glyphs, but different from what he has ever seen

before. He immediately wanted to ask about it but as he was opening his mouth to say so, Will cut him off in an unusual way, redirecting his attention to the topic of discussion.

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The next days were a difficult adaptation for Adam who tried to get used to his new surroundings. He had finally managed to hang his clothes in the bedroom's closet, and the few objects he had taken from his home that now adorned the bedside tables like the model of the satellite Calipso, helped him to feel more at ease.

Will and Hannibal gave him time to find his marks, helping him to keep his daily routines with fast eating times. Sensing his discomfort with his presence, Hannibal haven't pushed social interactions between them, which were also made difficult by Hannibal's work at the University of Pontevedra.

"He is teaching history and the fines arts there," said Will two days later while walking along the streets of Vigo, "he wanted to do something else than being a psychiatrist after we left Baltimore."
According to him, Hannibal was fluent in Spanish, among other languages.
"He tried to teach it to me a great number of times but I am still barely able to order food at the restaurant. They have different dialects and some of them are speaking Portuguese instead of Spanish," he added with a sigh, showing Adam the church Santa María de Castrelos.
Will was teaching forensic in English from time to time at the University of Santiago de Compostela where he picked Adam up a the airport.

Near the coast among old buildings, they found a little street exhibition made by research centres on the marine life. Colourful pictures of corals and fish were aligned on steel panels, showing the diversity of the Balearic reefs, along with a warning against the danger of pollution and mass tourism.

Adam was mesmerized by the different colours and forms of the corals. "It looks like nebulae!" he exclaimed, looking excitingly at Will, pointing at a picture of a large coral with rounded edges, "like a complex cosmic underwater system." He had never taken an interest in anything else than the solar system and all the cosmic phenomenons. This was new and at the same time it was familiar, giving him a strange giddy feeling that let him a bit unsteady.

They took to the library before driving home where Will bought him different books about the sea life. They found only one in English but Adam didn't mind as long as there were enough pictures to look at.

Later that day, after a pleasant dinner where Adam decided to try the risotto Hannibal had prepared only to find out to the latter delighted smile that it tasted surprisingly better than his usual macaroni and cheese, he walked along the little path leading to the beach to see the sunset. A newly acquired book under his arm.

Sitting on the white sand he thought about Harlan and Beth. They advised him against flying to Spain, saying the travel will be too stressful for him, that he was not ready for that kind of journey. They called him the day after he arrived. He didn't wanted to talk to them on the phone but they sounded very worried and used THAT kind of voice as if to placate him. He

didn't understood it. He thought they will encourage him like Will did.
He was a bit tired of it – of people talking to him like he was a frightened animal that was only made for captivity. Sure the unknown worried him and it took him a bit of courage to accept the idea of travelling that far, but at the same time he knew he needed to do these things, to challenge his own expectations.

He had difficulties to interpret his friends signals sometimes, but he wanted them to be direct with him, not to change the tone of their voice or the way they move into his space to accommodate him. There was a time where he would have been grateful for it. But not anymore. Now that he was here, in Spain with Will and Hannibal, he was actually glad for it.

He looked at the sea, shining under the evening sun, staining the sky in different shades of pink. It was peaceful, nothing like the uproar city life from his home. He liked it. Even the warmth was beginning to feel easier to bear.

Lost in the descending sun, looking up in the sky to find the first emerging stars where he knew Orion would soon rise, a sudden splashing sound coming from his left startled him.

A few feet away from him, a man emerged from the ocean, weaving his ashen blond hair between long fingers to press the water from them. For a few seconds Adam thought it was Hannibal as his face looked nearly exactly the same, but when the man turned his head to look in his direction, he could see it wasn't Will's husband.

To Adam's mortification the man was entirely naked.

The stranger smiled to him, a toothy grin that reached his eyes.
"Hello darling," he said in an enticing voice, approaching Adam quickly like a large predator advancing on his prey. "You must be Will's cousin."

Adam sprung to his feet in an instant, forgetting his book on the sand, running to the house where he found Hannibal and Will, taking a drink on the terrace, watching him approach with raised eyebrows.

"There is- " he began, trying to find his breath again, tripping on the first step as he came closer to them. Will stood up, rubbing circles on his back. "What is it Adam, you look like the devil was running after you."

Taking a deep breath and looking wearily behind him without seeing anything, he tried again.
"There is a naked man on the beach! He looks a lot like you," he told them, looking at Hannibal whose face enlightened in recognition by hearing that.
"Ah," Hannibal said, grinning slightly, "my apologizes for my brother's behaviour Adam. It seems that time haven't learned him any good manners." He rose while saying it, walking with confidence toward the beach to greet the dangerous exhibitionist.

Adam remarked then that Hannibal was only wearing a white shirt, sleeves folded to his elbows. It was disconcerting to see such a composed man without his layers of clothes. Somehow it makes Adam feels more comfortable.

Then he remembered what Hannibal just said to him.
"His brother?" he asked Will who was following his husband's retreat with a light frown on his face.
His cousin made a humming noise, turning slightly to look at him. "Sorry I haven't told you before Adam." The coldness was gone from his eyes. "Hannibal has a twin brother, Nigel. He is living in Bucarest in Romania. Seems that he got some problems there. We were told he was coming to visit but I was kind of hoping he wouldn't."

"You don't want to see him? Have he said something mean to you?" asked Adam, accepting the orange soda Will gave him from the little table.
"No it's not that don't worry. We have a good relationship and it's nice for Hannibal to see his brother. It has been quite some times." Will didn't really answered the question and Adam wanted to ask again but he felt that whatever Will was keeping to himself would not be said today.

Hannibal's brother appeared again in the study some times later where they were all seated, showing Adam pictures of their earliest trip to Italy. Much less naked to Adam's relief, the newcomer was now wearing dark blue jeans and a black short sleeves t-shirt showing his tan skin and chest hair. He was still barefoot, hair falling on his eyes, dangling a cigarette between two fingers.

Hannibal raised his head sharply, tutting at his brother. "You are not smoking inside Nigel."
"Go down from your horses *brolis*, I know not to fucking antagonize you with my disgusting habits as you called them. I haven't lighted that one yet." His gaze found Adam who despite his earlier fright couldn't look away from him.

He could now see how different the two brothers were, like two binary stars pulled around the same centre of gravity, never touching each other. Hannibal was very difficult to read for Adam, making him wary of the secretive man despite their improving relationship. Nigel was all openness and frankness, both with words and gestures, giving Adam the strange feeling that the man was both completely at ease in his environment, and not entirely belonging there.
"Actually," said Nigel still looking at him with warm eyes, "I was hoping you will come outside with me Adam, while I am having my smoke. We haven't really start on stable ground and I wanted a chance to apologize for frightening you little one."

Adam frown slightly at him. "I don't know why you are calling me that when you seem to already know my name despite the lack of introductions. I am on a very average size. I don't like the smell of cigarette and I am soon going to bed so I don't want to go with you outside. You said you wanted to apologize and you just did. I accept your apology."

Shock registered on Nigel's face for a second before he laughed loudly, shaking his head and grinning like he did on the beach, more teeth than lips.

"Are you making fun of me?" asked Adam, eyes following Nigel's left hand which was now very close to the mysterious little statue he saw when he arrived.
Following his gaze, Nigel smiled softened to something less predatory.
"I'm not making fun of you darling, I was not expecting that kind of answer. Honest and direct, just the way I like."

Adam made a non-committal noise, still looking at the statue. Nigel moved to stand directly in front of him, blocking the view.
"How about a quid pro quo, Adam." He said his name slowly, as if to taste it on his tongue. "If you come with me outside I promise you I won't disturb you with the offensive smell, and I'll satisfy that curiosity of yours about that piece of art behind me that seems to fascinate you. I promise it won't be long."

Adam thought a bit about it, curious to hear what the strange man will have to stay.
"Okay we can do that." He rose, following Nigel at the back of the house without noticing Will giving Hannibal's brother a non too pleasant smile, readying himself to interject. Hannibal prevented him from doing so by covering his mouth, narrowing his eyes at him in silent warning.

It was already dark when Nigel and Adam stepped outside on the patio, sitting down next to each other on the last step leading to Hannibal's little aromatic garden. The moon was shining brightly, accentuated Nigel's sharp features. The Romanian lighted his cigarette, took a big puff of it and blew the smoke away from Adam, looking at the distance. He took another drag of it, biting the side of his thumb in a kind of nervous gesture. Adam was about to stand when Nigel spoke.
"I am sorry I startled you before on the beach, didn't knew you would be there." He looked at Adam with soft eyes, hair falling against them again. Adam had to stop himself from reaching out for the wild strand to put it behind Nigel's ear. Surely that won't be polite to do so. Harlan told him it was custom to ask before touching someone for the first time.

"Where did you come from when I first saw you? Surely you didn't walk from Bucarest completely naked without any luggage in front of everyone?"
This made Nigel laugh again. More rebellious strands fell on his forehead. "No darling I am not that kind of exhibitionist." He took the cigarette to his mouth once again. "I arrived earlier at the house while you were away with Will and just decided to take a swim in the nude. The lack of neighbours surely fucking help to relax around here."

It didn't sound entirely honest, but Adam was not good at interpreting people, so he decided to accept it as it was.

The strange man was very close to him, invading more of his personal space with each passing minute as if daring Adam to move away from him.

"C- Can I help you with your hair? You can't see anything like this," he mumbled suddenly, earning a confused look from Nigel before he understood what he meant.

"Of course Adam, you can touch me all you want," he said smirking slightly, accentuated the words in a flirting way.
Adam frown, not sure what he meant by that.

"I'm teasing you little one, I could use some help with my fucking hair. Haven't cut them for a while." He bent his head slightly so Adam's fingers could tuck the soft strands of hair behind his ears.

When the young man looked at him again he gasped.
Nigel's eyes, now illuminated by the garden artificial lights, were quite stunning. They possessed the same golden colour as Hannibal's, with specs of green that seemed to glow faintly in the dark.
"You really have beautiful eyes," Adam said, still looking at him. "They are a little like the constellation Ophuichus." He paused looking away from Nigel's eyes to gaze at the stars shinning above them. "Did you know that Ophiuchus means "serpent-bearer" in ancient Greek? It was found by the astrologer Claudius Ptolemy. Its brightest star is Rasalhague at magnitude 2.07. We could see it during this season if we were living closer to the equator. The constellation contains different group of stars called star clusters as well as a nebula named IC 4603-4604..." he trailed off, taking a breath. "Sorry I shouldn't have said that, you probably don't want to hear it."

Nigel didn't look bored at all, entirely focused on him. "On the contrary darling I would love to hear about it. You can tell me all the things you want about the stars."

"You really want to?" asked Adam smiling excitedly at him. "You can say it if you don't, I prefer people to be honest with me and most of them find me weird and prefer to hide what they really think. I am not very good with social situations."

"You are doing perfectly fine Adam, people are just some ungrateful cunts who can't see the potential of others. There is nothing wrong with being weird. Weird people are much more interesting to be with that the deceptive normality of the fucking herd. If I want you to stop talking I'll tell you but right now I just want more. You seem very passionate about it. So Ophiuchuis, tell me darling."
Nigel didn't even mispronounced the name of the constellation, spelling it with a confidence that was unusual from most people. Maybe Nigel knew a little bit about the stars after all.

That night when Adam went to bed, later than he usually did, he dreamed of green cosmic matter, colourful corals weaving under the rhythm of the current, and a melodic voice that seemed to urge him to get lost into the gurgling water.

When he woke up hours later, the book he had forgotten on the beach was laying on his bedside table. There was a bracelet on it made of green stones and shells. One of the shell looked like a sort of fish, or a serpent. A little note sat next to it. *To the little Star Dreamer who sees emerald eyes in the sky and beauty in the ocean.*

Chapter End Notes

[How I imagine the bracelet to look like]

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this chapter: Blood, mild gore, violence and smut
Enjoy!

Adam stood early up the day after his encounter with Nigel. He went down to the kitchen where Hannibal was already preparing their breakfast, standing in front of the stove.

"Good morning Adam," he said without looking at him as soon as he entered. "Will is still sleeping. He had an agitated night and I didn't wanted to wake him up." *An agitated night?* Adam knew Will had always been prone to nightmares, particularly since his father died just before he attempted to enter the police academy. "Your milk and cereals are already on the dining table if you are hungry." Hannibal went on, opening the fridge to take large slices of meet looking like ham.

Adam gazed at the bacon in the frying pan. It gave a strong smell, not quite the same as the one he remembered from the last time he tried to eat bacon at Harlan's house. "I was hoping Nigel would be here. There is something I want to ask him."

Glancing down at the bracelet around Adam's wrist, Hannibal smiled in his usual enigmatic way, with just the corner of his mouth. Whatever he was thinking was not meant for Adam to understand. He flipped the meat, rolling his shoulders like he wanted to soothe an ache. "Nigel went on an early morning walk. You will find him on the beach I think. If you decide to go after him, will you please tell him that breakfast is ready?"

Adam decided to go after Nigel. He walked down to the beach, a large towel under his arm in case the man was feeling too relaxed with himself like the day before. As hinted by Hannibal he found him sitting on the sand, naked, with his feet in the water.

"You will catch a cold if you take a freezing bath every day. I don't understand what you find pleasant in that kind of activity," said Adam as a greeting while approaching him. He gazed openly at Nigel's back, marvelling at the strong musculature and the tattoo he had at the top of his left shoulder – the red skeletal form of a dog, with two capital letters, CD.

Nigel beamed under the scrutiny. "Hello darling. Have you tried a morning dive before?"

Adam turned his nose down at the suggestion in obvious dislike. "No and I don't want to. It seems quite cold and I am not very fond of open water. I have also never been a good swimmer."

"I assure you it's not that cold, particularly during this season thanks to the warm current coming from the Gulf of Mexico. You can't say you don't like it if you haven't tried before." Nigel stood up and walked in the shallow water, looking at Adam over his shoulder with a serious expression. "Come have a swim with me."

Staring at Nigel's masculine curves again as he progressed into the ocean without so much as wincing at the temperature, Adam reached the edge of the water, opening the towel between his hands to show it to Nigel. "Breakfast is ready and I just wanted to ask you why you gave me a bracelet," he called out, earning a pleased smile from Nigel when he saw the jewel on his wrist. "I haven't given you anything and I don't know you."

Nigel turned toward him and let himself slumped backward in the water. "I just like you darling and I wanted to give you a gift as a thanks for the lesson about the stars yesterday."

"I am not sure one should give a gift from simply having a conversation." Adam was beginning to be agitated, tapping his shoe lightly against the sand. "When did you find the time to buy it? The shops were probably closed after we finished talking. Did you stole it somewhere?"

The kind look on Nigel's face was replaced by something colder. His mouth twisted in displeasure.
"No Adam I didn't stole it. I made it myself. I gather things from the ocean from time to time. If you don't like it you can just give it back, I won't be offended." The way he said it made Adam feel uneasy. The young man could sense that Nigel would certainly be offended if he were to take it off. Adam didn't even wanted to. He was already attached to the bracelet, finding the gentle pressure on his wrist comforting. Even more now after Nigel told him he made it himself.

"No no, I like it. Thank you," he quickly said, "are you coming out now so we can go back to the house?" He then remembered something that has escaped his mind. "Oh and you still haven't told me about the statuette in the study like you said you will." Adam should be mad at that, Nigel didn't kept his words. But he couldn't resent the man for it after the pleasant conversation they had under the stars. Nigel must have forgotten.

"You're right darling." Nigel sneered playfully. He quickly ducked his head down to wet his hair. "Join me here and I promise you I'll tell you all about it. There is nothing to be afraid of, I'm right here. If you don't like it I'll never ask you to swim with me again."

Dropping the towel on the sand while making an irritated noise, Adam turned around to go back to the house, shouting at Nigel. "I am not going in the water, I don't even have a bath suit! Your breakfast is going to be cold and that will entirely be your fault!"

He stopped half-way toward the path, looking over his shoulder at the man who haven't moved at all from his position, chest deep into the sea. Nigel was smiling lazily at him in a feline way, not affected at all by his change of mood.

Sighting loudly, Adam walked back to the bank, stomping angrily in the sand, muttering to himself about a very stupid naked Romanian. He took his shoes and clothes off furiously and folded them on the ground, trying not to think about the silliness of the whole situation and

the fact that the material will be salty and humid when he will put his clothes back on again. Still clad in his blue brief, Adam walked hesitantly toward Nigel, hissing at the cold water hitting his skin. He forgot his irritation for a second when he saw the way Nigel was staring at him, as if he was the most precious treasure in the world.

Crawling to the young man who had water around his waist, Nigel made a soothing noise, guiding Adam deeper into the ocean with an encouraging touch on his shoulder.

Too preoccupied with his fears while he stepped wearily on the ocean floor, Adam took some time to register the warm touch on his skin.

"Is this okay?" asked the Romanian upon seeing Adam glaring at the hand on his shoulder.

Answering with a short nod, he let Nigel pulled him forward until the water covered the base of his neck. He refused to go further away.

"It's okay darling, I have you. I won't let you drown." Taking his other arm a little more firmly, Nigel steered him slowly until Adam's feet left the soft ground, careful not to let his head fall under the water.

Feeling insecure and clumsy at first, Adam began to relax under the warm touch, brass swimming tentatively in front of Nigel who kept an attentive eye on him. He eventually let Adam go when he felt the young man getting more confident.
"You are doing amazing darling. I should watch out for those skills of yours. You'll soon swim faster than me."

"Are you mocking me Nigel?" Adam was trying not to panic, wondering about all the dangerous things that might be hiding under him like jellyfish or sharks. "You are floating with barely a movement. I feel like I am sinking with each breath."

After a couple more round trips, getting better with Nigel's soft instructions, Adam got out of the water, sitting heavily on the sand, out of breath. His teacher came after him, taking the towel he dropped earlier on the sand to wrap it up around the young man's quivering form. He sat next to him, unbothered by the morning chill.

"Have you heard about Nug and Yeb darling?" asked Nigel out of blue, setting his arm around Adam's shoulders to keep him warm without pressing too much on his frame.

"No I haven't." Adam leaned into the man without thinking, finding the touch pleasant and welcomed. He could feel the warmth of his skin through the towel.

"How shall I put it...” Nigel pursued his lips, making a wet sound with them. “Hanni is much better for that kind of shit... Okay, let's try this. You are aware of myths yes? Tales written along history to explain different phenomenons, to guide the mob or simply to entertain. Generally there are some supernatural beings involved like gods or monsters. Take the Greek mythology for example." Looking down sideways, Nigel met a pair of captivating blue eyes waiting patiently to see where this was going.

"Well, there are some tales, distorted and reinvented from one author to the other, about very old gods. They are arrogantly referred to as the Outer Gods and some other terms like the Elder Gods or the Great Old Ones. Among them were two siblings, Nug and Yeb, also tastefully called the Twin Blasphemies, for lack of better fucking names." He scoffed at that. "They are the offspring of Shub-Niggurath and her mate Yog-Sothoth. Quiet the powerful bastards those two, could control time, space and all. The statuette you saw in Hanni's study is depicted them."

Fascinated by Nigel's words and the way those names came out his mouth with a guttural accent he haven't heard before, Adam thought about what he saw on the desk, a crease between his eyebrows.
"Outer Gods? Great Old Ones? I have never heard those terms. Hannibal must be very passionate about the subject if he bought the statuette. So the two shapes represent two deities. What kind of mythology is that? Where is it coming from? Why are they fighting? Why are there planets above them?"

Nigel chuckled at the torrent of questions, eyes fixing on the sea. "It's said that the siblings come from the fucking space, born on stars among our solar system. They arrived on Earth to rule over sea and land a very long time ago. What you saw as them fighting is more like er... like a complex way to show the immaterial nature they share, the deep connection they have. A bit like the yin and the yang." Nigel frown, opening his mouth as if to explain more but deciding against it. "Complex explanations are really not my thing darling. I can show you some books in my brother's collection if you want to know more."

Adam gathered sand between his hands, looking sceptical. "How can they be from space? Are they some sort of extraterrestrial life? It doesn't make sense. I have read myths around the creation of our solar system or the ones with the constellations coming from ancient Greece to explain how the stars came to look the way they do like the Northern Cross or Aries. I haven't given them too much interest. It is just old stories to embellish scientific occurrences, to make them more interesting."

"Is it darling?" There was a strange glint in Nigel's eyes. The green specs of his iris seemed to pull Adam into their depths. "I said it was a myth didn't I? Just some tales to give life a fucking meaning hum? But what if some of them were closer to the truth than what humans think? What if some higher beings were just around the corner? How would it make you feel?"

How would it make him feel? Adam didn't have the answer for that. He had a very rational mind and never believed in any superior intelligence that could be called a god. Nigel seemed to know a lot about that strange mythology and Adam wanted to hear the sound of his voice again when he spelled those names out. Maybe Nigel could read the books for him.

***

The following days, Hannibal's brother spent most of his time teaching Adam how to improve his swimming technique and feel more at ease in the ocean. The young man was enjoying himself, growing more and more confident to the point of starting contests with Nigel to see which of them could hold their breath longer underwater. Adam won a few times

but he was certain that Nigel was letting him win. The rough man had a particular grace while swimming, something Adam didn't expected him to have when they first met.

Adam watched, entranced, at the way the water slid along Nigel's strong frame, parting around his flexing shoulders as if afraid to touch his skin. He was moving like its denizen, barely out of breath, his tan and wet skin shinning under the sun.

Adam haven't thought much about masculine beauty before, having mostly been looking at women.
But he couldn't deny the attraction he was feeling toward Nigel the more time he spent with him. The strange man was never forceful on him, barely flirting with gentle touches and words, but neither was he too careful. As soon as Adam got used to the feeling of being in open water, Nigel didn't hesitated to tease him, going as far as keeping Adam's head underwater for a few seconds to test his trust. One time Adam panicked when he felt the current getting stronger. Nigel didn't reached for him like he expected him to, even if the man was attentively looking at him, telling him instead to relax and not fight against it. Adam got bolder and looked forward for their daily swim as soon as he woke up.

One week after his arrival, having spent his day watching documentaries from National Geographic about deep sea monsters (according to the rather exaggerating title), Adam was enthusiastically telling Will and Hannibal about the Six-Gill shark or the bio-luminescence of the Humpback Anglerfish during dinner. He gestured frantically on his chair, showing with pride a Cowrie Lava's shell Nigel had found for him. Or so he claimed considering that they don't live in the area as Will pointed out to him, looking at Nigel with irritation.

Will joined Adam in his bedroom later, looking with shock at the display of items littering each surface of the room. All gifts from Nigel, each of them coming from the ocean.

He sat on Adam's bed, watching the way his cousin's eyes roamed on the page he was currently looking at with a bunch of scarlet corals from the reef of Biscayne Bay. "You spent a lot of time with Nigel those last days. I thought you didn't like swimming, especially in the sea because of the irritation the salt provokes on your skin."

Adam made a non-interesting noise, still looking at his book.

"Adam!" called Will with more firmness that he intended, causing his cousin to look sharply at him, slightly irritated.

"What is it with you and Nigel, Will? You don't seem to like him even if you said the opposite last time when we were outside. He has been very kind to me. Are you jealous because I spend more time with him than with you?"

This got a surprised reaction from Will. "Of course not I'm not jealous. I am glad you have someone to spend the time with while I am working. I am sorry for that by the way, I wasn't supposed to have class during your time here. I can call sick tomorrow so we can have more time together."

"You shouldn't do that Will, it will be lying and that's not very nice for your students. We can have some time together next weekend when you don't have to work. I still have a week of

holiday and Nigel is driving us to the Sea Museum of Pontevedra tomorrow," Adam said the last part with a huge smile on his face, rocking his body on the bed like a kid going to buy his favourite toy.

"It's new this passion for the ocean," stated Will glancing at the dried starfish hanging on the wall above the bed. Another gift from Nigel. "You don't talk about the stars any more. They don't interest you?"

"Of course they do Will, you shouldn't ask what you already know." Adam thumbed absently at the green stones on his wrist. "It's very common to have different topics of interest. And we talk about the stars with Nigel. He told me about cosmic myths and the births of eldritch deities yesterday."

Will grimaced at that. "Eldritch deities? Where did you heard that? What did Nigel said to you?" He seemed angry now. "Adam I know you like him but I think you should stay away from him and all those stupid stories. Nigel isn't a good person, you shouldn't trust him like you do." He grabbed Adam's book, immediately regretting it when his cousin took it back violently. Face livid, he stood up so quickly that his sleepy legs couldn't bear him and he fell on the floor. Will came to help him up only to make the young man more furious.

"Why are you saying that to me?!" yelled Adam, "you don't know him!" He raised a trembling hand to his forehead, rubbing at the skin aggressively. "I have never felt that way since I met Beth. He makes me feel important, less like an unstable freak like everyone think."

Will opened his mouth to interject but Adam cut him off. "I have never been so comfortable with anyone before apart from you. He doesn't treat me differently. You have Hannibal, you don't understand how it feels to be so lonely! I have a few friends and my colleagues are nice to me. But even when I am with them I don't feel like I belong there."

Will gaze softened in a gentle smile. He slowly approached his shivering cousin. "On the contrary Adam, I know all too well how you feel."

Adam looked back at him, shaking his head. "Then why did you say that? You are hiding something from me and I don't like it. I am a grown adult, I don't need you to tell me what I should or shouldn't do." He left the room, shouting at Will not to follow him like he knew he wanted to.

Will sat back on the bed, exhaling slowly, touching a raised mark on the side of his neck. His husband appeared in the doorway, wearing a neutral expression.
"You had it coming dearest. There are some things that even you don't have any control of."

He snorted, looking at Hannibal. "Since when have I ever been in control other than under your influence? I want him to have a choice. He is the only family I have left apart from you and Nigel."

Raising his head slightly, Hannibal came to sit next to him on the bed, taking his hand between his own. He kissed the side of Will's forehead, inhaling slowly against his hair. "Are you under the impression that Nigel is affecting him in a way that is not fully approved by

Adam? The decisions are his own to make, and you know well about the importance of acceptance, vows of companionship and deep connections, despite your reluctance to admit it." His thumb grazed the golden ring on Will's finger. "Or have Yaldabaoth stolen yet again the exquisite shape of my Divine Will in his mischief?"

"You think you are so funny?" said Will, faking to be offended. "Or should I mentioned some poetic passages from Brian Lumley about the Spawn of the Winds?"

"Ah yes a very inspiring one. Humans have a vivid imagination. You should know then not to tease me too much if you don't want to be consumed my love." Hannibal grinned savagely at him with pointed teeth. Shadows grew around them, concealing the light of the bedroom.

"Actually," announced Will, "I think it's exactly what I want." He straddled Hannibal's waist with dark hooded eyes, raking his hands through his husband's hair.

The room blurred, cold air made Will shivered. His back hit something soft while he was vigorously kissed by demanding lips. There was a familiar scent in the air, a combination of them both. Their bedroom was plunged into darkness but they could perfectly see each others. Sharp nails dug into Will's clothes, tearing the fabric until he laid naked and shivering in adrenaline on the bed. Aurelian eyes moved across his skin while long fingers followed their trail, teasing a nipple on the way and the sensitive skin along Will's ribs. The empath gasped under the ravenous touch, feeling his partner's lust pouring around them like a palpable thick cloud of smoke. Hannibal coaxed him gently to turn on his hands and knees and a commanding touch pushed on his back until he was bent in a submissive position, completely vulnerable to the hungry eyes behind him.

“Hannibal, please,” Will begged, irritated at the way his partner made him feel during their intimate moments, all needy and obedient. He had never been like this with anyone and it took some long internal struggles to accept the power the other could have on him in those situations, especially after what happened in America when Will was working for the FBI. But despite the appearances, there was no imbalance between them. Not any more.

Wet and cold fingers caressed slowly between his ass cheeks, spreading lube where he wanted Hannibal the most. “Patience dearest, you know how good I will make you feel. Just breath and relax.” Hannibal always took his time to open him up, even if Will's body was used to the abundance of times it had been worshipped and loved.

Moaning impatiently under the unhurried pace of two skilled fingers pushing against his walls, Will gave an abrupt movement of his hips, impaling himself suddenly on the probing digits until the last knuckles.

An indignant growl answered his defiance followed by a strong body pinning him down to the mattress. The unexpected motion dislodged Hannibal's fingers and something bigger pushed against his entrance. “You never learned how to behave accordingly you insolent and beautiful creature.” Hannibal snarled possessively in his ear. “I should indulge you, just this time my love.”

Will victorious smirk broke into a loud moan when Hannibal entered him immediately, not stopping his trust until he was buried to the hilt. It was quiet the stretch but Hannibal was

mindful of his limits and the intrusion was accepted like a welcoming embrace. Will felt teeth against the scar on his neck, nipping at the delicate skin. A warning to what was to come.

It sobered him up from the haze of pleasure for a short moment, and his recent worry returned in his mind. He used his last bit of coherence to voice it, muttering against the pillow. "Is Adam safe with Nigel?"

Hannibal linked their fingers above their head, rumbling his answer against Will's throat in an intimidating way. "As safe as anyone can be between my brother's hands."

***

A strident cry resonated in the forest, disturbing the peaceful night.
Someone was running between the trees, loosing balance on one of their roots, mottling the dry leaves on the floor with crimson liquid.

The man crouched down between ferns, his laboured breath stuttered as he looked alarmingly around him, trying to discern unusual sounds and shadows. His head was bleeding from a blow he received forty minutes ago during his successful escape.

The lack of noises could indicate that he was not followed any longer by his pursuers, but he knew not to trust the logic in this situation. Nothing about what he fled from made any sense after all.

The brand on his arm, a black ankh upside down, was aching unbearably, as if the skin was burning. Whimpering under the renewed pain, clutching his arm, he felt his panic rise again. He had the dreading impression of being watched. The deer caught by a hunter's binocular – aware of the danger but incapable to see behind the camouflage.

Just as the man stood to run again, something long and massive came out of the shadows behind him, like a monstrous appendage, seizing him around the thigh. The strength of the grip crushed bones and muscles as the human fell on the ground, yelling in agony.

Leaves and dirt rustled at the passing of a dark and frightening form. The man could hear a heavy breath approaching his whimpering form. The chilling sound was coming from a huge mouth that filled the whole space of the creature's face. The otherworldly apparition didn't come from any fairy tales or children's books. It was a vision of horror and despair.

A long and weird tentacle on top of its head was moving from one side to the other, making the air sizzled around it. Blood was covering its tip from when it had clasped the now mangled leg of the man. The body of the newcomer was tall, entangled in thick and rounded protuberances looking like tendons. Black tendrils were sprouting from its back and shoulders. The nightmarish creature was standing on several limbs looking like roots, undulating on the ground like huge snakes. Orbs of lights were glowing under several parts of it's body, like incandescent ash. It was deprived of eyes, but the quivering man knew that it could perfectly see him.

A reverberating roar broke his helpless sounds, like the cry of a dying animal, freezing the man's blood in his veins. He was too frightened to look at it, couldn't move a limb under the

dark aura coming from the monster. There was no hope ; he could only wait for the inevitable. Begging for mercy was not a possibility as there was not a single ounce of benevolence in this being.

The culmination point of this macabre dance came without forewarning. Sharp claws tore the human's shape apart, sending blood and viscera splashing on the floor.

Silence would normally follow an act of slaughter, but not this time as a laughing human voice came from behind the trees next to the lacerated corpse. "The traitor got what he deserved my Lord."

The creature shrieked and changed, its huge form shortened and the long limbs disappeared in a cloud of darkness. The shape of a tall and slim man now stood in its place. The human appearance was pleasant to look at. Short black hair, dark eyes and a welcoming and open face, elegant clothes that were not made for a forest hike.

"My disobedient children," the charming man said joyously, shaking his head, "when will you learn to stand were you belong." He turned toward the human approaching him, a petite woman with piercing eyes and full lips. "Now then, enough playtime. We still have some pressing matter to resolve. Let's get to it."

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> This chapter have a gorgeous piece of art made by the very talented @beanyzilla. I am so very grateful she accepted to do it for me. Thanks a lot <3
> You can follow her here: https://twitter.com/beanyzilla?lang=en
> Please don't share the fanart without asking.

Adam was running. He didn't know where he was going. The cloudy night made it difficult to distinguish the shadows around him. He was angry and tired. A strong headache made him dizzy.

He heard a distant sound, like a low melody carried by the wind. The strange lyrics sounded like those that kept coming in his dreams. Dark and strange words that sent shivers down his spine.

There was a sudden rushing movement in front of him. His body collided with something solid. Hands came to steady him and he pushed harshly at the strong frame pressing against his own.

A familiar voice was murmuring something to him. He couldn't understand what it was saying but it calmed him down. He took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of sea water and something stronger, darker, like sea weeds and cooling bonfire.

"Nigel" he croaked, hugging the man tightly to him, weaving his fingers into the fabric of his t-shirt.

"I'm here little one." Nigel sat them down, embracing Adam against his chest.

Raising his head from the comfort of the man's scent, Adam looked around but couldn't see anything else than dark forms blurred behind the sparse fog surrounding them. He could feel grass and leaves against his bare ankles. "Where are we?"

"A little further away from the house darling. Had to stop you seeing how determined you were to run away. I would prefer not to have to take you to the hospital because you got driven over by a car. You want to talk about what happened?"

Loosening his grip on the man, Adam tried to gather his thoughts. Will's words were twisting in his head as he tried to understand why his cousin was so disturbed by his relationship with Nigel.

"What happened in Romania before you arrived here? Will said you were in troubles."

There was a firm but gentle touch against his hair, helping to loosen the remaining tension. "I was involved in some serious shit, the kind that tend to lead directly between bars."

"You are a criminal?" asked Adam, taking a few seconds to understand what he meant.

"Yeah something like that. But it's behind me now. I got tired of it all. I surrounded myself with the wrong people, was betrayed and decided eventually that it was not worth trying again." His voice sounded sad, lost in the memories. "I missed the closeness of the ocean, along with my brother's. Something compelled me to come here. I don't regret it one bit." The hand caressing his hair moved to the back of his neck, grasping it possessively, sending pleasant chills in Adam's body.

No one had ever touched him that way. With that much intention. Beth had always been soft with him, almost shy. Her affection had been predictable, something Adam was glad for. But for a reason he didn't understand, it also left him with an empty feeling.

"I am glad you did it Nigel. It would not have been the same without you here." He heard a pleased noise from the man followed by a wet sensation at the top of his forehead. Nigel's lips were touching the skin there, more a caress than a real kiss. When no complains came from Adam he did it again in another spot, until Adam's forehead was covered by his worship.

After a few minutes of comfortable silence, Nigel loosened his hold, looking carefully at Adam as if he could perfectly see him in the dark. "Adam, I wanted to ask you something. Will mentioned you weren't in any relationship but I need to know if you are close to someone."

"Close? You mean like dating or friends?" He couldn't perceive Nigel's expression so he focused on the warm skin against his knuckles, where his hand was tucked against the collar of Nigel's t-shirt. "I am not in a romantic relationship, and I have a few friends like Beth, Harlan or Mike. I had an intimate relation with Beth two years ago but we decided to end it. I don't think I have really been in love with her but she was kind to me." He felt Nigel tensed at the mention of Beth.

"How about you Nigel? Do you have a family in Romania? A partner or children?"

“There is no one darling, not any more.” His tone turned cold and bitter. “I was married once, to a woman called Gabriella. Things turned ugly – I mean, it didn't worked out between us.” His hands were back on Adam, rubbing along his shoulders and hips. His nails grazed the sensitive skin above Adam's pants sending a pleasant shock in the young man's stomach. “I told myself I'll never fall for that crap again. But here I am. Three years later and I can't get my eyes away from you little star. Though it has never been like this. Not with Gabi, not with anyone else.”

Adam was not sure he understood exactly what Nigel was telling him. “Are you saying that you are interested in a romantic relationship with me? I am not very good at it, but I think I would like to try. I don't know you well and Will said I had to stay away from you but I don't want to. I like you."

He felt Nigel's hands on both side of his face, his forehead came to rest lightly against his own. It was intimate, Nigel's breath mixing with his own.

"I like you too darling, a whole lot. You make the core of my fucking shell shakes like I've never felt before. But Will might be unto something there. My kind and your kind generally don't come so close together and for good reason."

The air around them was cold, making Adam shivered. He pushed his head back, causing Nigel's hands to lose their grip. "Your kind? What do you mean? Because you said you were a criminal?"

Nigel forced himself to place a little more distance between them. The gloomy atmosphere made Adam uneasy and he regretted the comforting closeness as soon as he felt Nigel withdraw. He wanted to reach for him. The Romanian's voice grew serious. "I'm a dangerous man Adam. I'll never purposefully hurt you and I'll protect you against every single person that doesn't accommodate you. But I'm a possessive one. If you permit me the taste of your skin, I might never let you go again. You said you don't really know me and if that's not the fucking truth. But I want you to see me as I really am, to look at the other side of the human veil. Once you do, I'll give you a choice, the last one before the point of no return."

Adam wasn't moving, struggling to grasp the meaning behind the strange phrasing.

"I don't think I understand everything you said Nigel, it doesn't sound very safe."

Nigel chuckled darkly. "Does it frightened you Adam? Should we head back to the house so you can have pleasant dreams instead? You should already be in bed." There was something heavy in the air, like a silent threat, the last seconds before the storm.

Adam raised himself on his knees and searched for Nigel's shoulders in the dark. He found them with sweaty hands, grounding himself from the increasing dread.

"It makes me nervous and I think we should probably go back to the house. But I don't care about it right now. I really want to kiss you. I think it will make me feel safer than your words. Is it okay?"

Shining green and golden orbs stared at him, giving the man an airy look.

Without answering, Nigel brought him closer. His lips hovered below Adam's, not quite touching yet, inviting him to take the last step. Adam took it, shyly at first, barely pressing his lips against Nigel's, testing the sensation of thin yet sensual flesh against his own. He withdrew slightly from the gentle contact, just long enough to hear a soft intake of air, like a purr, and he kissed Nigel again with more confidence. An easy slide of wet lips, trembling hands finding ashen strands of hair, exploring slowly. Adam felt overwhelmed by the novelty of the experience. It was nothing like kissing Beth. The tenderness of those lips mismatched the hard grip of broad hands sliding under his clothes to firmly caress the sensitive skin along his ribs, pinning him down as much as preventing him to get too close. A warning nip on his lower lip ended the kiss, letting in its wake a sensation of dizziness. Like his mind couldn't comprehend what he was feeling.

He didn't remembered how he went to bed after that. He could still feel the lingering feeling of lips on his own, along with the scent of the ocean, enveloping him like a comforting blanket. He barely heard the sound of Nigel's voice lulling him to sleep, like an irresistible melody tainted with a hint of danger and emerald.

***

The next day was spend in Vigo, city of Pontevedra. As promised, Nigel drove them there in a rented car to visit the Sea Museum at the edge of the coast. Adam learned about shipbuilding and fishing tradition, marvelling at the wooden model boats and the giant skeleton of a blue whale. After their visit they ate on the terrace of a closed by restaurant. Adam was smiling brightly under the warming sunlight, his hand resting on Nigel's thigh. Even the food, a traditional Galician dish called *empenada*, a pie filled with cod, had been to his taste.

He had talked with Will earlier during breakfast before leaving the house. His cousin looked tired and was carrying vibrant bruises along his neck. They had both apologized for their outburst and everything was back to normal. Will had even encouraged him to enjoy himself while Adam was being kissed by a smitten Nigel. If he was surprised by their developing relationship he didn't showed it.

After their lunch, Nigel had a surprise for Adam. He took him to the *Rias Baixas* for a snorkelling tour, stopping on the way in a nautical club to buy the material they needed.

Adam was delighted. His swimming skills had improved exponentially thanks to Nigel's guidance. When they arrived above the right spot in a little boat, Adam jumped boldly in the water, dressed in his bathing suit, without waiting for his companion. The latter was calling after him, shaking his head fondly and reminding Adam that he needed first to put his mask and snorkel on before he could dive in.

They progressed slowly in calm and turquoise water so Adam could get used to dive with a snorkel. Along a shallow reef they found orange and mauve sea stars, sea urchins, small octopuses and even a giant red crab that Nigel was holding carefully in the water for Adam to see without frightening it.

Adam was then led to a secluding spot in a little bay where the water was deeper. His companion disappeared from view under the rolling water like he wanted to reach for something at the bottom of the ocean, four meters below them. Keeping his snorkel in the open air, Adam looked down in the water to try to find different species of fish like the ones he saw in his books.

Looking slightly to the left in search of Nigel, his breath caught in his throat in shock.

The Romanian was slowly swimming in his direction, face bared of any diving material, and he was being followed by a multitude of fish – A band of Chameleon Cichlids, Blennies, a shy Rock Goby swimming along his back, and even a few Colmilleja that were very rare to observe so closely.

Nigel moved around Adam in graceful undulations of his body. His followers were barely registering Adam's presence, progressing in synchronization with the man as if he was a large sea mammal to seek protection to. The aquatic dance went on for some times. Adam stayed very still, too afraid to break off the spell, whatever it was. Ultimately the marine life departed from Nigel who broke through the surface of the water, encircling Adam into his arms. His skin felt cold and soft against his own.

Adam took off his mask, shock still lingering on his face. "How did you do that Nigel? It was amazing the way they were following you. I never thought they could be so trusted next to a human."

"Plenty of time to learn to know the marine life darling." He grinned at Adam, grabbing the back of his thighs to encourage the young man to wrap his legs around his waist, preventing his weigh from sinking down. "My natural charisma must have something to do with that too."

"Charisma has nothing to do with that Nigel. You didn't even came back up to breath and you don't look like a man who just spend the last 10 minutes underwater."

"For the record darling, a man managed to hold his breath for over 20 minutes once. I am hardly that exceptional." His grin intensified, giving him a predatory look.

"Still that's very impressive. It's like you became one with them down there. It doesn't make sense. You shouldn't be able to do that after living the last years in a capital city away from open water... And don't tell me you were having daily swim in the lake Morii in Bucarest because I won't believe you," he added upon seeing Nigel's prepared answer on the tip of his tongue.

The Romanian gave him a dirty look and he felt strong hands encircling his shoulders and the back of his head, caging him against cold skin. Heat rose in Adam's abdomen as Nigel's lips brushed against his own. He parted his mouth slightly and felt a rough tongue invaded it and lick against his own. A salty and sweet taste flooded his senses with desire, making his toes curled and his knees pressed against Nigel's sides. Adam broke the kiss to breath, opening his eyes to find half-lidded and hungry ones fixing on him. Nigel was upon him again, letting him no time to adjust to the sensations. The moment was not slow and measured like the kisses they had shared before. It was still gentle but demanding. Nigel's lips were wetly sucking around his own like he wanted to drink all the sweet sounds coming from Adam. Feeling him tensed against the flood of emotions, Nigel stopped the assault of his lips and trailed them slower along the young man's chin and neck, licking off the droplets of water he found there.

"Nigel," Adam moaned, feeling his cock stirred at the sensual touch. "You are trying to distract me."

"Is it working my little star?" asked Nigel huskily, earning another moan from his companion when he grounded their lower bodies together, feeling an answering hardness against his own. "Your skin tastes like the sweetest flower of the Gardens of Yin. I will never get enough of it." There was a desperation in his voice that made Adam look up. Nigel's eyes were even

more stunning under the sun, like fluorescent green corals. The golden colour was totally gone.

"Nigel," he whispered in awe at the startling charisma and beauty of his companion, "I feel like I am dreaming, like I am loosing my mind. This can't be real. You can't be real. You look like some kind of mythical creature like the ones you told me about."

It was meant as a joke, but Nigel was not laughing. He was watching Adam closely, as if waiting for something to drop. "I'm definitely not some stupid fable creature to amuse the ignorant darling. I'm very real. I wish I could show you now, but it's not the time yet. Let's return to the boat before I do something you might regret later."

Nigel broke their embrace and they returned to the boat. An uneasy feeling followed Adam in the pit of his stomach on his way home, until it was time for him to go to bed.

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Nightmares kept Adam from a restful sleep that night.

He was surrounded by water, so dense and heavy that he couldn't move, standing in the middle of an old building. Dark forms were twirling and shifting in mist of colours in front of him. He felt a presence at his back but couldn't turn to look at it. It seems huge, hovering above him, slick and cold skin resting against his own. There was a sharp feeling against his naked arm, slowly sliding down to his hand. The forms ahead of him regrouped themselves, looking more and more human like. Or were they? Something cold touched his jaw and a gasp of surprise escaped his throat, sending bubbles in the water. It could as well have been a gasp of terror. He felt like he was suffocating. He tried to move, his lungs tightened in his chest. The thing behind him crushed him to it, all sharp angles and biting edges. He felt like a fish in a snare, ready to be eaten alive by the hungry sharks.

Plop, plop, plop

He heard a familiar sound, getting louder and louder, clouding his senses. Like drops of water falling on a hard surface.

Plop, plop, plop

The suffocating feeling became stronger. He opened his mouth to breath and swallowed a mouthful of seawater. He was drowning, pain flared in his chest, submerging his brain in cold dread.

Adam woke up suddenly, searching for air, holding his heaving chest.

A dream, it was just a dream. He could still remember it, playing again and again like a film in front of his open eyes. He looked at the clock on the nightstand, seeing a daring 1.24 am.

It was too early to leave the bedroom but his fear kept him from falling back asleep. He went downstairs, still shivering from the cooling sweat on his skin. He switched the light on and

took a glass from the kitchen, filling it with water. He was about to drink it but couldn't. The cold liquid pressing against his lips sent a new surge of panic in his brain.

"Are you having difficulties to sleep Adam?" came an accentuated voice from his right. He looked up, placing the untouched glass on the counter.

Hannibal was watching him, clad in red and grey pyjamas, an indecipherable look on his face.

"You are shivering," he said leading Adam away from the kitchen to sit him on the couch in the study. He enveloped him in a light blue plaid. "I will make some tea, it will help you to relax."

He came back a few minutes later with two steaming cups that smelled of chamomile and lemon. Adam was still where he left him, a tight ball of fabric against one side of the couch.

"Drink it, it will help, I promise," he explained, sitting in a chair in front of him.

Glassy eyes stared at the cup, a refined piece of bone china. It was ornamented in gold along the handle and the rim, and dark blue patterns resembling sea knots.

Following the smoke rings that dances above it, something colourful that Adam had not seen before revealed itself above the modest fireplace. There was a painting on the wall, a full-body portraiture with three children looking at the inquiring eyes with a rigid expression unusual for their age. Two boys carrying identical facial features were holding the hands of a toddler, a girl with vibrant eyes and braided blonde hair adorned with white flowers. It could as well have been a portrait of an old royal family jugging by the regal look on their face and the fallen Roman buildings in the background. There was a torch on each side of the boys, one crowned with a black flame, the other with a blue one.

"Who is.." Adam started, cutting himself off when he felt another presence in the room.

"It was our younger sibling, Mischa," said the husky voice of Nigel. The man was leaning against the back of Hannibal's chair, right hand toying with the tips of his twin's short hair. Hannibal looked fondly at Nigel, scolding him gently when the latter ruffled the impeccable haircut in a playful way.

He kissed Hannibal on his forehead, making Adam smile at the tenderness of the gesture. It was the first time he witnessed a show of affection between them. It felt intimate, like something that was not meant for his eyes.

"We grew up together but were robbed of Mischa's radiant presence much too early. Better not to dwell too close on the past for now darling," said Nigel, kneeling in front of Adam who flinched slightly.

"Something wrong gorgeous? You don't look so well." He took the cup of tea from the table for Adam to hold.

"Your tales have given me nightmares," muttered Adam, eyeing the statue of Yeb and Nug wearily. "I was drowning and I couldn't do anything about it. I felt trapped and some frightening creatures wanted to eat me." He spilled some tea on the plaid with unsteady hands.

Nigel's own came up to support them. "Are you sure they wanted to eat you? You sound like it's my fault you were having nightmares." Something in the way he said it was not right.

"I don't know Nigel, I feel like everything is becoming too much." Adam took a deep breath to calm the raising panic. "Will is hiding something and I think you are hiding something too. My head is hurting, I don't want to swim with you any more, there is something wrong."

"Nothing is wrong darling. Are you having second thoughts about me? You want to go home maybe?" He had a frown on his face, giving him a dangerous look. His hands tightened around Adams possessively.

"No, no. I don't know. I don't think so. I just want to understand what you are not telling me."

Something quick happened between Nigel and Hannibal. A silent understanding. Nigel exhaled deeply and rose from the ground, setting Adam's cup down. He extended his hand to him.

"Do you trust me love?"

It was a simple question but it felt like the turning point of something huge. An invisible line that if crossed, will change his life forever. Adam thought about all the good moments they have shared together. The addictive way Nigel looked at him all the time, like he was something to be cherished, and not to be embarrassed about. Like he mattered. He always felt like a ghost, looking at but never really seen by anyone.

Until now.

Adam was very nervous and the impossibility to identify what was going to happen during the rest of the night made his whole body trembled. His inner logic was telling him to flee, to go back to his home in California where everything was safe, where the ground was stable and well-known. But he was tired to be afraid and to always search the comfort of stability. He thought Nigel was becoming familiar, was grounding him. He had been a fool to believe that. All along it has been nothing like it. Nigel was dangerous, daring him to come out of his shell, out of the normality of his routines. Adam was walking on something slippery. But even if he falls, he didn't wanted to stop.

He took Nigel's hand, firmly, and was led outside by the man, toward the sea, by the path he had taken so many times those last days.

In the study, Hannibal rose, approaching the window to watch their retreating forms in the night. "What would an ocean be without a monster lurking in the dark? It would be like sleep without dreams," he quoted, a sharp smile on his face.

His husband's chin came to rest on his shoulder, arms encircling his waist from behind.

Will made a worried noise, looking sadly in the same direction. “Beware the dark pool at the bottom of our hearts. In its icy, black depths dwell strange and twisted creatures it is best not to disturb.”

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Adam raised his head to look at the night sky. The moon was full and very bright, illuminating the landscape all around them. It was so huge he could see the lines of its crates.

"Nigel!" he exclaimed, "we are the 28th of June, it is the night of the Strawberry Moon, even if it won't be red tonight."

"I know darling. It's one of my favourite time of the year." Nigel stopped at the edge of the ocean and took his pyjama shorts off, the only piece of clothes he was wearing. "I need you to do something for me my star," he said calmly without looking back at Adam. "Stay here and close your eyes. Don't open them until I told you to, you understand?"

Adam frowned at the strange request, still shaken by his previous nightmare. "Why do you want me to do that? I don't feel like going in the water right now."

"I know darling, I won't take you to the water but I need you to stay close to it. Nothing bad is going to happen to you." He turned, took Adam's hands in his own and brought them to his lips, kissing each of them slowly. He looked at Adam until their eyes met and held him there.

"Not everything have a fucking scientific explanation my star. Sometimes the best thing to do is to stop thinking and let yourself feel the world around you. Shall we try that?"

Adam nodded. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

"I won't let your drown Adam," whispered Nigel in his ear, squeezing his hands one last time before he let them go, backing away until his entire form disappeared into the black water.

Adam stood still, eyes tightly shut. Everything was quiet apart for his quickening pulse.

There was a wet sound, like falling water. Nigel was coming back to him. What was he doing? Did he wanted to show him another fish? But he couldn't take it out of the water, it will die.

He heard more gurgling sounds, something was snapping like the branches of a tree. And then he felt a presence in front of him. The air was saturated with the scent he knew belonging to Nigel. But it was much stronger, intense and wild, tickling his nose.

He made a movement to touch him but felt nothing at first, his hand hanged in the air, trying to reach for Nigel. The hair on his arm rose as his fingers came suddenly in contact with something smooth and wet, colder than skin. He trailed his fingers up and a rough sensation replaced the smoothness, like small scales that parted slightly under his touch.

He wanted to open his eyes but prevented himself from doing so by pressing his other hand on them. "Nigel?" he called.

"Yes" a throaty voice answered him.

He grazed something hard and sharp as he raised his hand higher, making Nigel recoiled slightly from the touch.

"Careful little one. Some part of my body could easily cut your skin." It sounded a bit different than Nigel's voice, more rasping and resonating, like a strange echo. But he knew it was him. Nigel didn't touch him nor did he came closer. Adam moved his hand to the side, the tip of his fingers caressed something soft at first and then thin, ridged like fins.

"You... you are not – human," said Adam in a stuttering whisper.

"No. I am not darling. You want to see it for yourself? See what monsters truly look like? You can open your eyes on one condition. Don't cry out and don't run away. Remember, I won't hurt you."

"I know you won't," said Adam, believing it strongly despite his apprehension.

He opened his eyes slowly and raised his head, looking at the huge form hovering above him.

It was taller than him, around 8 feet tall, a little broader than Nigel had been a few minutes ago, with well-defined muscles that were made to hunt and kill. His skin seemed to be a shade of aquamarine with dots along the lines of his chest, his belly, and on the underside of his legs and arms. The latter were long with webbed hands and dark claws. There were patches of extensive and sharp fins on his forearms and also on his legs and thighs. Looking down, Adam saw long webbed feet like paws with four fingers and crooked claws. They were covered in thick scales and pointed bones, just like several other parts of his anatomy. There were barbs at the top of his shoulders and gills at the side of his neck. A thick and long tail covered with fins emerged behind him. The tip of it was lavished with stingers that looked poisonous. Something was moving lazily above Nigel. After a bit of confusion Adam could see that it was some sort of thin and translucent tendrils that seemed to emerge from the upper part of his back. His face could have been seen very human-like, but as Nigel lowered himself slowly to Adam's level so he could have a better look, he saw that it was nothing like it. He could still recognize Nigel's human features but they were sharper with unnatural angles around his chin, the back of his jaw and at the top of his cheekbones. His eyes were a vibrant emerald with golden specs and dark horizontal pupils like the ones he had seen on a giant octopus once. His human ears were replaced by very large scales looking like scallop seashells on each side of his head. The thin strands of blond hair looked softer, about the same length as the ones he had in his human form.

Adam was stunned into silence, mouth hanging open in disbelief. Nigel looked wearily at him.

"Darling?" he asked, rolling the consonant on his tongue, making Adam shivered. "Are you afraid? Should I change back?

The aquatic creature was shocked in disbelief when he saw a little human hand advancing slowly to rest shyly at the edge of his jaw. Adam smiled warmly, tears fell from his eyes.

"You are a liar," he said, sniffing, "you told me I was going to see a monster. You are not a monster Nigel." He caressed the rough skin under his fingers. "You are so beautiful. Why are you not touching me?"

Nigel took the permission immediately, enclosing Adam between his long arms, careful not to squeeze him too tightly. Adam was light-headed by the strange feeling of Nigel's scales against his lips, where his head was tucked near a strong shoulder. His hands wandered hesitantly, finding something hard and edgy along his lower back. *His back spine is ridged,* he thought, amazed at all the differences from his human form.

"My star," whispered Nigel, "how lucky I am to have found you."

He could feel the hard plane of Nigel's body against his own, increasing his need to experience more of it without the barrier of his clothes. He took a step back and withdrew his pyjama and boxer brief, shivering in the cold and his innocent excitement.

He was about to hug Nigel again when he saw the hungry look in his green eyes. The creature shuddered, his tail flickered behind him.

"I want to feel you against me Nigel. Do you want it too? Is it allowed?"

It was more difficult for Adam to decipher Nigel's body language in this form. His face was nearly inscrutable, but some subtle details like the dips of his lips and the glint in his eyes gave some of his thoughts away. It looked like Nigel couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"You can touch me my courageous little darling, I want to feel you just as much. A warning though. In that form my instincts are wilder than in my human form. I can control them of course but I am a very possessive and dominant being. If you tease me too much I won't be able to control my need for you and I might do something you are not yet ready for."

"You mean sex?" asked Adam blushing, feeling warmth creeping on his face and neck when he looked furtively down where Nigel's cock should have been, to see nothing but smooth skin.

Nigel chuckled when he saw where Adam was looking. "Yes darling. It's one thing to accept me in this form, but entirely another to experience it in a carnal way. My biology is not the same as yours. I don't want to make a wrong move that will scare you away from me. You haven't been with a man before have you?"

"No I haven't," said Adam, looking back at Nigel's face. “But you are not a man. Are you even what is considered to be a "male"?” The last part was careful and he hoped he haven't offended Nigel. "Sorry," he added quickly, "I shouldn't have said that."

Nigel large hand came to rest on his cheek, careful not to nick the skin with his claws. "I'm not insulted little star. That's a clever question. I won't explain anything now but let's say that my kind is, in human term, non-binary. We do not strictly identified as male or female, but we may choose to appear like one or the other if it pleases us.”

A thousand questions came to Adam's mind now that the initial shock was gone.

Nigel took his hand, guiding him toward the water. "Come love, you wanted to feel me against you didn't you? Is it okay to do it in the sea? It will feel better."

Nodding Adam followed him in shallow water, kneeling down with Nigel to explore his skin, marvelling at the difference of textures. Under the moonlight, Nigel's tendrils and fins began to glow at each extremities, lightening the ocean floor like predators in deep water, luring their prey to come closer. And Adam came closer until he was totally enveloped by the creature's presence, feeling more alive that he had ever felt before.

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They saw the sunrise together, sitting on the beach under a large cover with their clothes back on. Adam was in Nigel's lap, snoring softly. Nigel was back in his human form, murmuring in Adam's ear, rubbing his face against his dark hair.

"I have to admit darling you surprised me. Didn't thought you'll react so well seeing my real form."

"What would you have done if I hadn't?" said a sleepy voice against him.

"I wish I could tell you I would have let you go love. But," he said, biting Adam's ear gently, "I rather think I would have kidnapped you, taking you far away in the ocean where no fucking one could find you."

Adam opened his eyes, smiling at him. "Really? Doesn't sound so bad if I could breath underwater like you do. But I think I would miss Will so I would prefer if you don't do that." He looked ahead of them at the seagulls flying in an orange sky.

"What are you exactly Nigel? Some sort of mermaid?"

A strangled sound came next to him. "Do I look like a fucking mermaid darling?"

Adam laughed at the outraged he saw on Nigel's face. "No not really. At least not one from The Little Mermaid. But I guess those tales aren't really true. Or are there real mermaids?"

"No darling, no mermaids, or at least nothing like what you can find in children's books." He took a moment to formulate what he wanted to say. "There are many different kinds of creatures on this world, most of them are hidden from human eyes, living in deep waters, wild forests or abandoned places. Or even in other planes of existence. Others live in plain daylight in human form."

"Like you when you look like this?" asked Adam, touching Nigel's hand, wondering what it was he was touching now. "And Hannibal, is he just like you? Does Will know?"

"Adam before we go on you have to understand that you can tell no fucking one about that apart for us four. Most humans won't believe you, but a few are aware of it, even partly. And there are still some ignorant, pathetic, greedy motherfuckers around the world that wish us gone. Even if they can't really hurt us, they will be bothersome. My kind can take very different shapes, human-like or hideous monstrosities as humans nicely put it. You can call

the one you saw earlier my real form, or at least the one I choose to represent my essence, the core of my existence. It was bigger and more immaterial before. I changed it for something a tad more adequate to the landscape and its inhabitants. During the last centuries my brother and I have changed places and names several times to accommodate the evolution of human kind and to better disguise us among them." He looked down at Adam who was drinking each word in adoration.

"And as you already guessed, Hannibal is of the same kind, but he is not ruling over the sea and his real form doesn't look like mine. We have been fiercely loyal to each other since millions of years, and our bond is stronger than any other in the fucking unive-"

"Wait wait," interrupted Adam, looking shocked. "Millions of years? Ruling?" "Are you telling me you are like an immortal king?"

Nigel smiled indulgently at him. "You remember the stories I told you about old gods coming from space to live on Earth millions years ago?"

Adam's mouth was hanging open, a non-committal noise came out of his throat. He stood, pacing around Nigel. "The myths about the old gods are true? That's not possible. You just told me humans didn't knew about your existence, or are those stories not written by humans?"

"They were written by humans and most of them are exaggerated and falsified. But a few of them are very close to the truth even if some of the names or affiliations are off-track. A few of your kind have met us, studied us. Most of them were killed in their greed and vanity, but a handful was left alive to share the tales. Humans have witnessed our power threw out history, creating mythologies and calling us by other names like Poseidon, Lir or Bangpûtys which are the ones humans gifted me with. We were worshipped, sacrifices were made for us. But today, the human kind is blind to our existence."

Adam fell on his knees in front of him.

"I am dating a god, an alien god who rules over the ocean. I must still be dreaming." He held a trembling hand to Nigel's face, stopping just shy of his skin. "I shouldn't even be touching you. Why are you interested in me? You knew who I was before you met me didn't you?"

Nigel took his hand, bringing it to his cheek. "You have every fucking right to touch me love. Your kind sees us as something divine, but in truth we are not. Your brain can't comprehend the nature of our immortality. No human's technology or science can explain the complexity of what we are, of what we can do. Time and space mean nothing to us. So they called us gods as if to justify their blasting weakness and lack of understanding."

Adam raised his eyebrows. “You swear so much all the time, you cannot be a god. I can't imagine a deity swearing like you do.”

Nigel laughed at that. “Some bad habit I took from my life in Romania darling.” He stood and took Adam back toward the house. "The human mind is fragile and I'm afraid I've already overwhelmed you my star. We should talk more about it later. Take your time to register what you just learned. Otherwise it could drive you crazy like so many before."

2021
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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this chapter: Violence (against the main character) and blood.
Things will get a bit darker from now on :)

A lots of information and references are coming in the following chapters (along with a variety of outlandish names for those who are not familiar with it!). I have tried to be truthful to the pantheon developed by Lovecraft, Derleth and others, but it's a complex universe so I had to make it simple and not dwell too much in the details. I have also largely adapted the mythos to fit the plot and the characters. Some terms are completely from my imagination.

Please comments if you have any questions regarding the lore, and tell me what you think!

If you want to read about it you can start with H. P. Lovecraft Wiki, as well as some good podcasts on Youtube. I will come with more reading materials at the end of the fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A feeling of nausea and intense pain woke him up. He reached at the source of it, touching the edge of a wound at the top of his head and along his cheekbone. He hissed at the burning feeling, trying to sit up in vain when dizziness obliged him to lie back down.

The ground against his back was cold and hard, a huge contrast to the softness and warmth of the sand he was accustomed to. He whimpered in distress, trying to open his eyes through the throb in his head to look around.

He didn't recognized where he was. The room lacking windows was barely lit by a tiny wall lamp across from him. The air was chilly and damp, smelling of something earthy. His left hand landed in a freezing puddle when he finally managed to raise himself up. The only way out seemed to be a large wooden door to his right.

It looks like a cell, he thought in horror, trying without loosing it to remember what happened before he woke up.

A shuffling noise started him, making him aware that he was not alone. A boy who couldn't have been older than twenty years old, was sitting in a corner, head between his raised knees. His entire body was shaking. Something dark was littering the front of the boy's t-shirt and his tattered beige pants.

Blood, he realized, feeling a shiver of dread crawling along his spine.

“Who are you?” he asked the boy, his voice quivering, “where are we?”

The boy's head snapped in his direction, tears were silently rolling down his cheeks.

“We going to die!” he whined with a strong accent that sounded European. He made a sound with unfocused eyes, like a strangled laugh. “Ils existent... ils existent... Les Grands Anciens. Ils vont nous chasser et nous exterminer... On ne peut – rien faire.” He giggled uncontrollably and chocked on his sobs.

“He has lost his mind. There is nothing we can do for him,” said a feminine voice behind him. He haven't registered her presence in his daze. The source of it was a young dark-skinned woman with long black hair and fierce eyes. She spoke to Adam with a pleasant voice, sitting crossed-legs with her head against the wall. “I'm Alicia, that guy is Benjamin. He comes from France and I from Arizona. I met him here when they captured me maybe two weeks ago. Hard to tell how long it's been from here. And you?” She gazed at his right hand that drummed the same frenetic rhythm against his knee, just under his blue shorts.

He forced himself to stop, breathing harshly against the still lingering pain in his head. A nasty throb obliged him to close his eyes, hissing behind his teeth.

“My name is Adam. I think I have lost my memories, I can't remember why I am here. Where are we?” he repeated again.

Alicia smiled softly at him, a look of pity in her brown eyes. “My bet is on Canada, probably close to Vancouver. It's where I was heading before they caught me. My parents were sent there to investigate."

Adam's eyes went wide. Canada? How was it possible? What had happened after he went to the market with Will to buy a gift for Harlan and Beth?

He grabbed his hair in his fists angrily and rocked his body as if the repeated movement could summon the missing answers. Alicia came next to him, prying his hands gently away from their tight grip, failing to calm him down with soft whispers.

“Hey it's okay Adam, just breathe. It's gonna be alright. Don't listen to Benjamin, I have no intention to die here. They want to frighten us, to drive us crazy like they did to him. We have to stay strong.” She took a look at the wound on Adam's head, removing a lock of hair plastered in the dried blood, making him winced. “Your wound doesn't seem too severe, but you may have a concussion. Just breathe slowly and don't try to stand up.”

He wanted to ask who she was referring to when she said “they”. But he was too tired and disoriented to talk. He stayed close to Alicia, finding comfort in her calm and strong attitude. She gave him a cup filled with water, courtesy of their kidnappers, and his headache receded to something more bearable.

Adam reached for his neck, realizing something was missing. The necklace Nigel gave him was gone. *Nigel! The necklace!* Broken pieces of his memories came back to him, dampening the emptiness and loss he had felt since he woke up.

Seven hours ago

A shark with a huge smile wearing sunglasses and a red t-shirt was looking at him from the back of his box of cereal. Adam was eating small mouthfuls of it, looking absently at the marketing choice of that specific brand, praising the benefit of whole grain with vibrant colours and large letters.

He felt disconnected from reality, or more precisely from the reality he knew about before Nigel showed him a whole new aspect of this world three days ago. Nightmares had returned to him, more vivid than before. They were plagued with gigantic creatures full of tentacles with huge maws hunting men and women down, green runes shining on old stones while asteroids collided in the sky creating abyss of despair and void.

He always woke up with the same feeling of fear, drenched in sweat, wondering if Nigel had killed humans, and if it was for self-defence or for sport. One question was followed by another until the happiness and amazement he had felt that magical night under the strawberry moon transformed themselves in doubt and confusion.

But each time he saw the adoration in Nigel's eyes, felt soft and demanding lips against his own, he forgot about his worries. They didn't talked about it, to a point where Adam pondered if he had not dreamed it all. If the beautiful and otherworldly creature Adam saw on the beach was not part of a subconscious gorged with too much fantastic stories and myths. He kept himself away from Hannibal's books, from the sea and the stars, spending time with Will and finding reassurance in his daily routines.

Two hours later, he was walking around a crowded market with his cousin, looking at hand-made candles and wooden objects. His trip back to his home in California was planned in two days and he wanted to bring a souvenir to Harlan and Beth.

The thought of being apart from Nigel depressed him, but maybe he could convince the man to come live closer to him in California. There was plenty of water along the coast for his boyfriend's taste. He frown at his thoughts. Boyfriend? Was it what they were? Their relationship felt stronger than that despite the short period of time they have known each other. Lovers? But they haven't done anything too intimate apart from kissing and hugging.

Each time they were together, Adam lost himself to the other's touch. The intensity of their kisses this morning had clouded his mind with lust. He had been so aroused that he had tried to take Nigel shirt off while devouring his mouth, rutting the evidence of his arousal against his thigh. To his disappointment, when Adam's tongue had slid on inhuman teeth that had easily cut the sensitive skin, Nigel had stopped him, growling deep in his chest, licking the blood that had gathered against his lips. His human disguise waned when he got lost in lust and he was frightened to hurt Adam in his passion. Or maybe there was something else that he was not saying.

Adam sighed, turning his eyes away from the stand and his thoughts from Nigel to try finding Will in the crowd.

At that moment, someone crashed into him, sending him on the ground with a loud thud.

"Oh I'm so sorry, I didn't saw you," someone said, helping him up. Adam didn't like the stranger's touch and recoiled from it, trying to walk away from them while keeping his head down. But the rude person, a small woman around her forties, grabbed him by the arm.

"Wait," she said in a friendly voice, "are you lost? You seem a bit distressed. Do you need help with something?" Adam met her eyes and was about to tell her politely that he was fine and didn't need her help but the words got caught in his throat.

The woman's eyes didn't matched her voice. They were cold and calculating, dark brown looking down at the necklace around his neck, the one Nigel gave him two days ago after their evening walk. It was a simple plaited leather necklace with a long pendant made in opal. A strange symbol was carved on it, like a glyph. Nigel had denied him any explanation, except the clear order not to take it off with a glint in his eyes that looked like worry or apprehension.

"Oh," the woman purred, smiling malevolently at him, "I thought he was tired of playing after he killed his last human pet. What a strange pastime. Our Lords sure are having their fun. You must me pretty special to him if you are still alive."

Before Adam could react he was grabbed forcefully from behind by two hooded figures he hadn't seen coming to him. He tried to call after Will, to grab the attention of the passing people around the market. To his horror his cries weren't registered by anyone as if no one could hear him except his assailants, and he felt powerless against their strength.

"I will stop being difficult if I were you boy," said the same woman walking ahead of them. "We don't have any patience for childishness and no one can help you." She punctuated her last words by showing Adam her left arm where red glowing symbols were sizzling on her pale skin. The glyphs seemed to be of the same written language as the ones from the statue in his cousin's study or the one Adam carried on his necklace. She laughed at his puzzled expression, knocking him hard on the head, rending him unconscious.

Present time

“I still can't remember what happened after they kidnapped me.” Adam didn't know how long he has been gone. He was shivering from the cold and his empty stomach began to let itself known. Will and Nigel must be very worried, he hoped they will find him soon one way or another. “How could I be in Canada now when I was in Spain with my cousin? I must have lost consciousness for a very long time during the travel.”

Alicia snorted next to him, glancing at his tired frame. “You can't remember because it took only a second for them to bring you here.”

“What do you mean? No one can travel eight thousand kilometres that fast.” Adam frown in confusion.

She squinted at him, like she was trying to figure something out. “No planes, no cars, no human technology Adam. They use magic stones for a great many things, one of them being teleportation.” Seeing shock but also acknowledgment in Adam's eyes she went on. “They are also in possession of the Starstones. It's a very cold stone, some say it had been touched by the frigid cold of space and its power was activated by stars and moon on Earth. Using it is very dangerous. If touched, the user will feel a chill of terror like any other. Do you know something about magic Adam?”

“Magic – stones,” he stammered, “I – I haven't heard about that. But I read stories about the existence of another race, different from us.” Adam hesitated, biting his lower lip to stop himself from saying too much. Nigel told him not to talk about it. But Alicia might already know about Nigel's kind and she seemed like someone that could be trusted. He might not have been dreaming after all. “Hm are you referring to magic related to the Ancient Gods, the ones who came from the stars?”

Alicia smiled, breathing in relief. “I was hoping you knew already about that, otherwise it would have been a nightmare to try explaining those oddities again. Benjamin didn't took it so well when he found out about the gods.”

She gazed sadly at the stilled form ahead of them. Benjamin had passed out not so long ago after murmuring some intelligible things. “Where did you read that? You are not a member of The Wilmarth Foundation are you? Or maybe you are part of the cult of Larazos? Kyro has been hunting them down for a long time now.”

She winced at the lost and panicked look on Adam's face. “Oh, sorry Adam. I'm going too fast aren't I? I'm so used to it now, I forgot how it feels to live as a normal person, free from all the weird and crazy stuff.” She stood to sit in front of him, looking at his face with patient eyes. “Let's try again. You were talking about Ancient Gods. Are you familiar with the terms Elder Gods or The Great Old Ones?”

Adam remained silent, gathering his arms around his middle as if to protect himself against the uncomfortable feeling growing in his guts by hearing those terms again. “You must know a bit about it,” she insisted, “otherwise they wouldn't have taken an interest in you. ”

“I have heard about it and read some of the myths related to the stars and the creation of our universe. But it is a new interest and I don't know a lot about it yet. I don't know about Larazos or Kyro or the foundation you talked about.” Adam felt overwhelmed. He wanted to tell her about the stars and the beautiful fish he saw with Nigel. But he forced himself to remain quiet and listen to what she knows. He hoped Nigel won't be angry about it.

Alicia took a deep breath, clapping her hands energetically against her knees. "Okay, well I will try to put it simply according to what the official texts of the Wilmarth Foundation are saying. But you will probably find controversial information in the books you read. I just

hope you didn't come across the Necronomicon, that book can drive you crazy by just looking at it." Alicia took another deep breath, smiling at Adam like she was simply explaining where the clouds came from. "The Elder Gods are the most ancient and powerful of them all. They are alien entities that were worshipped since the beginning of human kind under different names. They rule on our world and on others across the galaxies. They were at war with their brethren called The Great Old Ones, evil and destructive monsters like Cthulhu. Some of the Great Old Ones were defeated and imprisoned on Earth by the Elder Gods and also by humans like the members of a British organization called as I said before the Wilmarth Foundation. It's a secret agency aiming to erase the presence and domination of all cosmic entities, whether they call themselves gods or not. I am part of that organization." She beamed at Adam like it was something to be very proud of. "I was sent to Canada to investigate the disappearance of several agents, including my parents." Her expression fell. "Unfortunately, they were killed by those bastards, the ones that imprisoned us. I knew that already, but it was something else to hear it from their disgusting mouths."

She stopped, looking at Adam who seemed to be struggling against his raising panic. "Now that we are feet deep together in this mess I guess it won't hurt to tell you a little more about that place. I guess you haven't heard about the Cult of Ad'ryth?"

Adam shook his head, wishing more and more that Nigel was here to take him away from this place.

"The ones who brought you here are part of the cult of Ad'ryth, a group of powerful worshippers, obeying the commands of an evil alien being called Nyarlathotep. Today he goes by the name Kyro. He has the looks of a charming man but don't let yourself fooled. He is a monster, as malevolent and cruel as the god he serves, Azathoth."

Adam haven't heard those names before but they were probably related to Nigel. What was he apart from being a powerful creature ruling on the sea? He talked about old kind of gods but didn't specify which one of them. Were those evil gods the same kind than Nigel? Could it have something to do with Nug and Yeb, the twins depicted on the statue? There was a raising panic crawling under Adam' skin like the flow of information threatening to swallow the ground around him. There were so many questions he needed to ask Nigel.

"Kyro is the most cunning of them all," Alicia went on, oblivious of his intern conflict. "He is the messenger of the Outer Gods and is incredibly dangerous. It is said that he will bring our world to its extinction. The Wilmarth Foundation have tried for many years to put an end to the reign of those hideous and reckless beasts. Even the Elder Gods, as immortal and transcendent as they may appear must have a weak point. As I said, many tales talk about eldritch beings who have been imprisoned and banished from our world. There must be something we can do to reclaim what belongs to us. Take our world back from the influence of those evil gods." She closed her hands against tight fists, a look of hatred in her eyes. "I will avenge my parents and destroy the cult of Ad'ryth."

Adam felt his chest tightened at her words. Nigel told him about some people who were against him and Hannibal. Alicia wouldn't like Nigel very much if she were to meet him and understand what he was. Adam couldn't tell her anything about it.

“You were saying that the Elder Gods were good. So there are some who are not like that Kyro and don't hurt humans?” There was a desperation in his voice.

“That's what the original texts are saying,” she huffed, “good is an exaggerated term. There is nothing good in them Adam. Elder Gods or not they are all the same. They don't care about us, they feel no compassion or kindness. We are nothing more than mosquitoes buzzing around their heads. When they get tired of us, they kill us.”

Adam couldn't stifle the weak sound of anguish that escaped his throat. “That's not true!” he said angrily, “there must be more to it, otherwise we will all be already dead.” Nigel could never hurt him.

The corner of her mouth raised ruefully at him. “If they kill us all there will be nothing left to play with. I don't know your story Adam and I think there is something important that you are not saying. But whatever the reason, you can trust me on that. I am young but I've already seen my share of horrible things. If you want to survive long enough to go back to your loved ones, don't let your guard down.”

Adam was surprised by her apparent calm despite the situation. She couldn't have been older than him but had plenty of courage and knowledge. He wanted to believe her but the part of him that was protective of Nigel and of the moments they had shared together was resentful of her heated words toward a race that could be Nigel's own.

The moment was broken by echoing footsteps approaching their cell, followed by the chilling click of a key unlocking the door. A dark figure appeared in the doorway, holding a flashlight in front of him.

"Time to give you a warm welcome boy," the man said, smiling unpleasantly at Adam. His form was imposing, broad shoulders on a high frame. His brown hair were long, hanging in a ponytail. He had a wicked glint in his blue eyes and Adam could perceive the shape of a large scar crossing his face from the middle of his nose to the stubble on his left cheek. He hold a strange object in his gloved hand, a sort of conic red stone with a rough shape. He cast it between Alicia and Adam and everything felt suddenly as if a shock wave had busted into the space.

Adam fell heavily on his side, shouting in agony as a terrible sound exploded around them, like a high-pitched howl that instantly hurt his ears and increased his headache so much that he thought he could pass out from the intensity of it. No one could move an inch when the man who seemed entirely unaffected by the sound grabbed Adam by the collar of his t-shirt and dragged him along the corridor.

When the ringing in his ears stopped and he could open his eyes again, he saw that he had been pulled to a large room, resembling a wine cellar with brown stoned walls and grey tiles floor. Modern beige wooden furniture were scattered in the middle of the space along with brown leather sofas and chairs, and five glass tables of diverse sizes. The whole space had a chic and cosy atmosphere, accentuated by marble statues with distorted curved forms. It was such a huge contrast after the rustic aspect of the cell and the boorish man who took him from it that Adam had a hard time gathering his thoughts and making sense of the human figures around him.

There were five people standing in the lounge: The huge man with his scar on Adam's left, keeping an eye on him as if Adam was in any state of mind to run away ; the rude woman who captured him at the market, harbouring the same calculating smile, leaning against the wall in front of him. Another man and woman stood stiffly close to each others behind the main sofa, their expression neutral and closed.

"Hello Adam," a syrupy voice said, "welcome in my home. I am so please to meet you. I have been waited for that moment with trepidation since my followers told me about you."

Adam sat with difficulty, looking ahead where another man was perched in the middle of the sofa, smiling brightly at him with too white teeth. His own fearful gaze met intense obsidian eyes belonging to a young and angular face. Jet hair with short and messy strands framed smooth and pale skin. The man had an elegant piercing on his right ear and an assortment of black stoned jewels around his neck and wrists. He wore dark grey suit pants and a burgundy shirt.

He looked handsome by human standards and attracted the attention of the little gathering, placing him as an important person.

The man seemed content enough to let Adam stared at him, not expecting any kind of answer from him. "Forgive me dear, you must be quite uncomfortable sitting here on the floor." His smile turned vicious in an instant. "Please take a seat."

Without waiting for Adam to react, he was grabbed none too gently by his shoulders to be sited down in front of his enigmatic host.

The man's eyes were all over him, giving Adam an icy feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach.

"So," said the man suddenly with a little cheerful bounce, "I guess we need to introduce ourselves before we can have some serious conversation you and I." He went on after a little dramatic pause. "You can call me Kyro if you feel bold enough to do so, but I would much more prefer you to address me as "My Lord" or "Master" like everyone else does."

He rose from the couch and to Adam's mortification came to sit directly on the armchair next to him, leaning his frame against Adam's shoulder. The young man tried to put some distance between them, but the quick movement of a hand against his head prevented him from doing so, clutching his hair in a tight grip that brought his nose directly against Kyro's chest.

"Please let me go!" he cried out, struggling against the violent touch.

The man's perfume was too sweet, hiding some heavy and unpleasant smell that made Adam nauseous, like breathing directly into a pit full of decaying food.

A yelp of pain echoed in the room when the vicious grip of the man yanked too harshly at the skin of his head to stop Adam's attempts to move away from him.

"My dear boy," he whispered coldly in Adam's ear, "I think I should explain to you the situation you find yourself into.” His other hand grabbed the back of Adam's neck like one

does to a disobeying pet. "You don't have any control here. Each struggle will lead you more and more to the end of your miserable existence. You will soon find out that I don't have a single ounce of patience in me. So submit to me now before I separate that pretty head of yours from your body."

Adam stilled his movements immediately upon hearing those frightening words.

"This is much better," said Kyro approvingly, withdrawing Adam's face from his chest to look at him. There was something dark and terrifying about that man, hiding behind his suave appearance.

"Listen to me well Adam, as I will only say it once." He licked slowly at the dried blood on Adam's head. "I know who you are little human, I know of your close relation with that piece of trash that acts as if he was all-seeing and all-powerful. I saw you, swimming with him as if shrimps were allowed to swim with sharks, oblivious of the danger when you should be crawling at his feet." He hissed the words against Adam's wound, making it flare in renewed pain. "Do you know who he is Adam? Have you seen the beast underneath the human's skin? I don't understand what that filthy reptile is playing at by choosing someone as weak and pathetic as you to belong to one of us, but then again," he paused, inhaling deeply against Adam throat, "he haven't mated you yet as he? Maybe you are not as valuable as I thought you were. Maybe he doesn't care about you at all and is merely using you as a distraction from his deplorable and meaningless existence."

Adam hold his tongue, refusing to meet the intense gaze boring into his soul.

Kyro made a graceful gesture with his hand and Adam's lost necklace appeared in his palm. He placed it back around the young man's neck, looking down at the glyph, representing a sort of abstract lizard, with a calculating expression. "Do you know why he placed that symbol around your neck my little human? It is a modern sign of ownership and protection. By making you wear his mark, he laid a claim upon you."

He caressed Adam's throat with the pad of a finger, making him shiver in disgust. "In the old days the stupidest of us who took humans as mates bit their neck in a show of dominance, like putting a collar around a dog's neck." He punctuated his words by licking the sensitive skin behind Adam's ear, laughing when Adam recoiled from the intrusive touch. "What a naive mistake from his part, putting that thing around your neck like baring a wound to the hungry wolf. His weakness is even more disappointed that I thought. We shall challenge your usefulness before I decide what to do with you my little slave. If that imbecile shows up I will put on a good show just for him. How should it go?" he asked his minions around him, raising Adam higher, making him gasped against the bruising grip still around his throat.

"You should flay him my Lord," said the man with the scar. "So that moronic god can hear how pretty his voice is when he begs and cries."

"We could use him as a sacrifice your Highness," a feminine voice said, "and let the shoggoths feast on his flesh to reclaim their allegiance to us."

Kyro hummed pensively. "What brilliant ideas you have my faithful servants." A sharp nail sliced Adam across the side of his neck, spilling red liquid on the demon's finger that he

quickly brought to his mouth. "But maybe it would be a shame to waste such young and innocent beauty all at once. I could also keep you all to myself Adam. Desecrate your body in front of him, savour each centimetre of your skin, day after day until madness destroy your soul."

The shape of the man grew to become more and more monstrous like. Adam's feet left the ground and the hand around his throat felt bigger, its grip powerful and sharp, making Adam suffocate .

Darkness was slowly replacing the pain he was feeling in his whole body, but the despair and fear creeping in his mind at that moment, when Nyarlathotep revealed his true form, followed him out in the obscurity, like nothing he has ever felt before.

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The air was dry and electric, burning his skin where he stood in the sand. Around him laid kilometres of desert and burned landscape. Fallen stone buildings were scattered on the ground, most of them half buried in the sand. Adam was alone and felt empty. Like a soulless wanderer who had given hope on life itself. The sky was dark with thunder clouds, there was not a single sound around him.

He walked toward a half broken tower, pulled forward by an unseen force like a puppet.

As the monument drew closer, he could hear something, vibrating through the sand, like drums.

A figure stood in the entrance of the tower. He couldn't see its face but it seems familiar, and when he finally stood in front of it, he felt his pulse jumped in his throat.

Nigel?

The figure turned to look at him. And there he was. His Nigel.

Adam came closer, arms stretched out toward his partner, feeling a newfound joy bursting in his heart. But when his fingers grazed the fabric of Nigel's clothes he stopped.

Something was wrong. What was Nigel doing in a place like this? Adam tried to say something to him but no sound came, like he couldn't talk. The man in front of him looked indeed like his lover, strong and beautiful, but his eyes were different. The emerald colour of his iris was gone, replaced by a dull brown shade.

The building above them trembled and collapsed. Adam shrieked and fell on the sand, protecting his head with his arms. He closed his eyes tightly but felt no pain or heavy mass falling on him.

There was a touch, warm hands rubbing his shoulders soothingly and wet lips on his forehead, kissing the skin there softly. It felt good, like a weighted blanket during his moments of panic.

"It's okay Adam," said the man in front of him. The accent was melodic and sweet but sent an unpleasant and yet familiar shiver through his spine.

The tower was no more, replaced instead by thousands of stars and dark colours rotating slowly around them. They were kneeling in the air, surrounded by the vastness of the universe.

Adam was in awe, looking around him as he recognized some of his favourite nebulae. They had never looked so real and majestic than in that moment.

"There are so many things I could show you my boy. Great powers you can't even imagine. You could be immortal, you could see the stars every day, learn their shape, their scent, their secrets. All you have ever wanted to know about our cosmos. I will give it to you."

Adam stood, shaking the kind touch away and taking a few steps back.

"I want nothing from you," he said, shocking himself by the steadiness of his tone. "You are not Nigel." He felt a new kind of warmth spreading through him, emanating from his bracelet and necklace, both shinning a vibrant and comforting green. Something whispered in his head, the same exotic words he has heard before, each time he was lost.

The shape of the man resembling Nigel began to blur, merging back and forth like a swirling mist. It took another form, one unknown and quiet frightening. A tall and faceless figure stood now in front of him, with too many limbs looking like tentacles.

"Foolish child," a dark voice resonated around him.

And then he was falling into nothingness.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:
"Ils existent... ils existent... Les Grands Anciens. Ils vont nous chasser et nous exterminer... On ne peut – rien faire"

"They exist... they exist... The Great Old Ones. They will hunt us down and exterminate us... There is nothing - we can do."

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Blood, gore, violence, and abusive use of eldritch deities titles

This part was difficult to write so I hope you like it. Next chapter will be softer :)
Thank you for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adam woke up with a start, panting. His throat was dry and sore.

He heard a relieved sigh from Alicia who helped him to lean against the wall. "Thanks the gods you are awake. You were screaming and shaking and I couldn't wake you up. Your nightmare must have been terrifying. What happened after that bastard took you away?"

He told her of his frightening encounter with Kyro, but left out the part where he thought he saw a false image of Nigel in a strange dream.

"You met him," Alicia pressed her lips against her teeth, "Nyarlathotep, the Howler in the Dark, God of the Desert, Stalker Among the Stars. He is an utter manipulative bastard that takes infinite pleasure in inspiring fear and awe in us in equal measure. He is a shapeshifter and a master at travelling through space and time, like most of his kind."

Adam nodded. He was exhausted, like he was sinking in the desert from his dream, swallowed by the scorching and heavy sand. One week ago, this would not have made any sense. The absurdity of the existence of an alien race playing gods since the beginning of time, and powers that have no scientific explanation with our modern knowledge. Quantum physics and astronomy seemed completely obsolete now. *We know so little*. How to cope with those revelations without becoming crazy? Adam did just what Nigel told him to do. He took a deep breath and on the exhale decided that he just had to accept it, without thinking of the how and why.

He also wondered about the way Alicia talked about them, those cosmic entities. She hated them and wanted them gone, but there was also a part of her who was afraid of what she didn't understood. She didn't knew what she was seeing when she looked at them. How a being who is so powerful, can change its shape and live millions of years, could be anything else than a deity. Adam didn't knew either.

"The Wilmarth Foundation has tried to take him down countless times but he managed to trick them every single one of them." Alicia pushed herself against the wall next to Adam, taking his hand tightly but not painfully. "You can't give up Adam. Whatever Kyro is planning to do to you. We are stronger than he thinks. The other agents know where I am. They will send help, you'll see. We'll soon be freed from this place."

Her optimism was met with a weak smile. Adam had never been good at reading people's confusing signals, but he could easily read hers despite her efforts to hide it. The subtle way she winced each time she moved her thin frame, muscles and joints aching from lack of exercise, from siting and sleeping way too long on the hard floor of their cell. There was a tightness under her eyes, and on the dark skin of her hands. She had been here much longer than he had, wore her own exhaustion and share of bruises and scratches. She was worried but she didn't wanted to lose hope. Adam liked her for that, for her courage, her strength and kindness.

He was not deprived of hope himself. He had felt it in his nightmare through the warmth in his heart and the well-known tune in his head. Help was on its way.

Time passed slowly as Adam and Alicia tried to dull their worry by improvising games of wit and conversations about their respective lives. Adam talked in great length about the stars and his work at the observatory in California. Alicia listened to him patiently, relieved to have someone to listen to after days of solitude. Indeed, her only cellmate until now, Benjamin, was not the chatty type. He was as silent as a heavy cloud, only manifesting his presence with sudden mental outbreaks. But little by little, the young man left his cowering position on the floor and began to move closer to them, blinking in the dim room, trying to grasp the meaning of what Adam was saying.

Lost in his explanation and the memories flashing in front of his eyes, it took Adam some times to realize that he had been deviating from the original topic (the Sh2-155 nebula from the constellation Cepheus) and was now describing the beautiful *Pentapora foliacea ,* an orange coral that he saw on the coast of Galicia while diving with Nigel.

As soon as the words escaped, he tightly shut his mouth, looking unsure at Alicia who raised her eyebrows curiously at him.

“Who is Nigel? Is it him you were visiting in Spain when they caught you?”

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Adam weighed his words carefully. “I was visiting my cousin in Spain. Nigel is – one of his friend. We met accidentally when I arrived.” He winced, so far it was not really a lie. As uncomfortable as the subject was in presence of Alicia, he couldn't help the smile that tugged at his lips. “I was afraid of the ocean, but Nigel helped me to overcome it. He showed me how beautiful everything is underwater when you know where and how to look.”

Alicia sent him a fond look. “It seems like this Nigel became a good holiday friend. Is he a marine biologist or something?”

This made Adam grinned, the initial shock of his slipping tongue forgotten. “Well, not really no. He just really care for the marine life and he wants to protect it.” He caressed the bracelet on his wrist with the tips of his fingers in a comforting gesture. The movement was not lost on Alicia.

“Believe me, some things definitely don't need protecting down there. But I understand, we have done so much harm to our oceans and seas. Did he gave you that bracelet? A token of his - appreciation?” Her voice was playful and she pat Adam on his shoulder when her last

question wasn't understood. “What I mean Adam is that I have the impression you care a lot for him.”

“He gave me the bracelet and also other things I don't think I deserved.” He raised his gaze to Alicia's. His next words came a bit colder than he intended to. “He swears a lot and he has a bad temper sometimes, but he has been very nice to me and I miss him.”

He suddenly put his hand on his chest, trying to feel for his necklace and realizing to his great relief that the pendant with the glyph was hiding from view under his shirt. If Alicia saw it she said nothing, just acquiescing with a vague movement of her head.

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Adam had no idea how much time had passed since he had been made prisoner. It felt like weeks but it couldn't have been more than a day or two. He stared restless at the door, tracing the contour of the panel, counting the cracks in the wood. His eyes were used to the dark now, and the pain in his head and around his neck where Kyro had pressed and cut the skin, was a dull ache he barely registered. Water was brought to them as well as a bowl of raw and dark meat and a chunk of bread.

Alicia took the meat and sniffed it suspiciously. "I don't think it comes from any animal we know. Benjamin ate it the first day he arrived here and went violently sick. We should share the bread and let the meat alone.”

They ate their meagre share in silence, Benjamin and Adam were pressed against Alicia's sides, trying to warm their body and ease their mind with welcoming heat. The air around them was damp and smelled of excrement and dirt. They were treated like animals, forced to relieve themselves in the corner of the cell. There were no furniture, not even a piece of fabric to keep them warm. Adam wanted to shout, to bang his fists on the door and soothe his frustrations in any way possible. But each time he felt his resolve shattered, he closed his eyes and saw Nigel's beautiful eyes shining in the dark. He imagined caressing his smooth and scaly skin, licking the salt from his lips. He tried to remember the song that he carried with him in his sleeping and awakening hours, recalling only the first words. But they throbbed in his heart like a drum.

Ya yogfm'l, gokar'luh ot gn'th.

It felt like a leery light in the dark, to guide him back to land or lose him more to the sea. But in that moment, he just wanted the sea to take him away.

Their wait drew to a sudden halt when the man with the scar on his face came again a few minutes later, using the same cursed stone to incapacitate them while they were being taken away from the cell. Adam understood that the stone was used more for sadistic purpose than to subdue the threat they could pose.

They were dragged to a very large room Adam was not familiar with, directly carved into the mountain, illuminated by floating orbs of light. The high ceiling was supported by limestone pillars. Uneven stairs ahead of them with six steps led to an altar surrounded by three statues of distorted figures. Circles of glyph had been traced with blood on the floor.

The place was crowded with two dozens worshippers, some he recognized from his first meeting with Kyro. The well-known little frame of the woman he had met two times before came to their kneeling position. Her eyes hold the same malevolence that bled on the rictus of her red mouth. She had traded her regular clothes to a long beige ceremonial robe decorated with strange round patterns.

“Good evening my little lambs. You must be so bored waiting for someone to come rescue you, we thought you could use a bit of entertainment.” She grinned as Benjamin's voice whimpered behind her.

When the woman turned to walk to the altar, Adam gaped at the scene in front of them. Benjamin was held by two hooded figures standing in the middle of a giant pentagram with geometrical symbols and glyph.

Adam felt his blood freeze in his veins. The grotesque scene seemed to come straight from the films he disliked, the kind that never ends well.

“What are they going to do to him?” he heard himself whispered.

Alicia's face lacked of emotion when she answered, as if she knew this would happen. Her tone was distant and cold. "He is going to be sacrificed to Kyro. That's what they tend to do to their prisoners. Using us as a mean to quench the gods blood thirst or increase their power during horrific rituals. Each god has its followers. Either you submit to them in a life of servitude, or you are useless and you quickly die. You can't be friends with them, you can't be aware of their existence and go on peacefully with your life. Knowledge is a curse. Like I told you, those bloody monsters know nothing about compassion or kindness. They don't feel any remorse, don't feel love. They are cold beasts that delight in our fear, in our pain."

Adam shivered, tears blurred his vision. He had sensed something dark and dangerous in Nigel when they were physically close to each other. But Nigel said he would never hurt him. He couldn't lie to Adam.

Manipulative beings had said Alicia. Although he trust Nigel he didn't know much about him. He had never seen what Nigel was capable of, never wanted to really acknowledge it, too afraid of what it could mean.

"Why would they do that?" he asked quietly, looking wearily behind them at the man keeping an eye on them, "these people, they are humans aren't they?" He knew the answer already but felt like he wanted to hang a little longer on his naivety.

"Why do you think?" snorted Alicia humourlessly. "What humans generally search for by killing and betraying their own kind?"

Power came to Adam's mind, *an easy way to escape from their fear and sustain their greed.*

Adam looked up at the ceiling to escape the reality of the moment, following with his eyes the water gathering there. A drop fell to the ground where he was kneeling.

Plop

The worshippers gathered closer in front of the altar, their voices boomed in the room as they began to recite something in the same guttural language that plagued Adam's mind.

“It's *R'Lyehian,”* he heard Alicia answer his unspoken question. “The language of the Old Ones.”

On the altar, the worshipper took a long dagger with a double asymmetrical blade decorated with two golden creatures resembling sphinx. She approached the trio at the centre where the two hooded figures tore at Benjamin's clothes, revealing a pale and thin body that was too weak to stand on its own.

Adam watched in stunned horror as the woman raised the dagger above Benjamin, mumbling incoherent phrasing as the crowd cheered in excitement.

As she was about to strike, Alicia sprang on her feet and ran toward the altar, colliding with the worshipper in a mess of curses. Their body fell on a statue that wobbled dangerously on its pedestal.

Two men grabbed Alicia and hit her hard on her face and in her stomach. She groaned in pain and was stroke again by the woman she was holding down. Adam rose in panic and felt someone seized him from behind with an arm around his throat.

“Easy boy or there will be two sacrifices today,” said the deep voice of their jailer with the scar, “that's not what our Lord ordered but I'm sure he won't mind a taste before he really take care of you.”

His vision blurred as he was lifted, carried around and roughly pressed against the pavement of the altar. A knee pushed at his back and a broad hand hold the back of his head tightly by the hair, rising it from the ground. Something sharp grazed at the skin above his shorts and he cried out in shock.

His vision was restricted and he could only see dark shoes standing on red symbols, could only hear Benjamin whined next to him as the ritual resumed. He lifted his eyes to see Alicia's unconscious body at the other side of the pentagram. The worshipper above her was bleeding heavily from a large cut on her lips and chin.

Adam closed his eyes and used his last strength to shout at the top of his lungs, using all his frustrations, his pain and fear to make his voice heard.

“NIGEEEEL!”

Their was a moment of airy stillness. The worshippers looked at him, trying to understand what he had said. Alicia moved faintly, roused by the desperate call.

A cold drop fell on his hand at the same time as the ground vibrated under it. Someone shouted among Kyro's followers and soon after other voices rose, not in delight this time but in fright. Then came a daunting roaring that reverberated against the stoned walls. It sounded like the cry of an agonizing animal, the kind you hear only from others tales without believing them. It gained in intensity, shaking the floor like an earthquake.

There was a wet spreading sound and the weight on Adam lifted, giving him the chance to raise himself painfully up on all four. He looked around in a daze and saw that the entire room was now filled with water. The thin lay of liquid seemed to come directly from the ground despite the lack of gaps. It grew in size in an alarming speed. It grew and grew until the altar was submerged in cold salted water that lapped at Adam's thighs.

Adam didn't panic unlike his captors who ran around the room, clinging at each other. He was used to it and it reminded him of Nigel. The comforting scent of the sea engulfed his mind like a balm.

"Stay calm!" shouted the woman holding now a very awake Alicia who was kicking at her. "Use the weapons you were given and remember that we know no fear! Hail Kyro The God of a Thou-"

Before she could finish her sentence, a powerful wave of freezing air and water blasted from the middle of the room, sending the followers gathered there flying around. Adam stood to prevent from being wiped out of his feet by the strong waves coming at him. The frightening sound came back, changing its tone like a powerful howl with several intonations.

From the still effervescent water at the centre of the room appeared two giant forms. The one on Adam's left had a very long and thin frame with extended black arms and legs ending in huge claws. Bones and fur were encircling its bare tendons and muscles like a sort of horrific armour. Its head had the shape of a monstrous stag skull, with white eyes and two rows of terrifying fangs spilling out of its mouth, giving it a frozen grin. There was a blazing black halo-like form above its antlered head and a very long tail waving between its legs.

Adam recognized immediately the one to his right.

It was Nigel as a sea creature. But his form was slightly different from the one he remembered. He was taller and broader, the fins along his frame were also sharper, ending in raised tips that looked as dangerous as the stingers at the end of his tail. A green smouldering half-halo hovered above his head like the creature next to him. There was a coldness in his alien eyes that Adam had never seen before. Nigel looked absolutely furious, casting around him an aura so thick and dark that Adam could feel it invaded every inch of his body and soul. He shook uncontrollably, like he was seeing Nigel for the first time, or at least this overpowering version of him. He had been told by the man himself that Nigel was not a god. But if he was not divine, then Adam didn't knew anymore what it was he was seeing.

Everyone around him was as much affected, looking in shock and awe at the two figures. The one Adam knew with the dagger stepped next to him. She took hold of the collar of his t-shirt and applied the blade directly against his throat. The young man saw a red tint on it and hoped that Benjamin was still alive. "Ithaqua," he heard her mumbled in a confused tone, "the White Silence, Lord of the Winds. Why is he here? And the other, is it... Bokrug? He shouldn't look like this... Why didn't he came alone?"

Bokrug? Adam had never heard of that name before. And *Ithaqua?* Perhaps it was one of the name used by Hannibal in his real form. It could only be him standing next to Nigel, just as huge and frightening.

One of the worshipper, armed with a blazing kind of thick spear, appeared suddenly in front of Nigel in an inhuman jump, aiming for a part of his stomach, yelling something intelligible.

Hannibal's claws slashed through the air in a loud whoosh, too quick to be followed by naked eyes. They rent the body of the attacker apart as easily as cutting into soft butter. Blood splashed on the water and on Nigel's scales. The latter picked some of it on a black claw and licked it clean, emerald horizontal pupils fixed upon Adam and the woman still holding him at knife end.

"Ithaqua! Great Lord of the Frozen Forest," she shouted at Hannibal whose attention was now also directed at her. "Why are you here oh mighty Great Old One? Bokrug is a vile impostor who betrayed your kind to live like a human among the worst of them. He decimated all Ugga-Naach engendered by our Lord Nyarlathotep. He deserves to die!"

The wendigo-like god turned to Nigel who grinned humorously at him before advancing slowly but deliberately toward the duo on the altar.

"Hand me my human you ignorant piece of filth", his voice roared across the room, "you were already dead before you even laid a hand on him. I will make your death very painful if you don't get away from him, now."

The woman's grip on Adam tightened and she backed away against the wall, looking around the room as if searching for something.

Nigel growled menacingly and was about to reach them when a huge mass of dark tentacles fell upon him, sending a succession of waves around the room.

The fight that happened next was too fast and too chaotic for Adam to fully register.

Destabilized by a powerful wave, his captor broke her hold, sending them both tumbling down the altar in the freezing water. Around them were deafening sounds of slashing claws and roaring beasts. Kyro's followers were caught in a vice, useless against the unexpected strength of their opponents.

Adam was lost, unable to stand still as each time he tried to, a new wave crushed him back against the wall. His ears were ringing and the strong smell of blood made him nauseous. He shouted Nigel's name in an attempt to see if he was fine, but his weak voice got lost in the general commotion. He felt something soft bumping against him and jumped as he saw a mangled body floating next to him, impossible to identify in its state of laceration.

He screamed and heard a faint sound, like someone was calling him.

Alicia was half-running, half-swimming toward him, looking pale and out of breath. When she reached him, she hugged him tightly and opened her hand where a little black stone was laying.

“Adam, we have to get out of here now before we get killed! I took this stone from the worshipper, I know how to use it. I will teleport us to a safe place and we will figure out how to send you back home.”

“I can't leave now!” he said loudly to be heard, shaking her touch, “Nigel is here, everything will be fine now, he will take us away from here.”

Alicia looked at him, puzzled. She gazed down at the pendant hanging now in open air in front of his t-shirt, and behind her where three gods were fighting. A loud crack resonated in the room as one of the central pillar broke under Kyro's weight when a blow crashed his monstrous frame down.

“Bokrug called you *his human*. What did he meant by that?” Her tone was cold and she was now looking at him with distrust.

Adam took the pendant in his palm and met her eyes. “I don't know any Bokrug, but one of these creatures is Nigel. He is not like Kyro, he won't hurt you. I am sorry I didn't told you what he was but I was afraid you will get angry.”

A look of both understanding and furry crossed her bruised face. “Adam, listen, you don't know what you are talking about. You told me you met this Nigel during your holidays! If you didn't lied to me about it then you know nothing about him! He is not Nigel he is Bokrug! He has manipulated you from the start. I refuse to trade one cage for another, and I won't let you here with them.” A sudden sharp light coming from Adam's hand surprised her. “Adam look!”

Adam looked down at the pendant only to gasp in shock.

The glyph which used to depict a sort of lizard on its coiling tail was now harbouring a complete different shape. The symbol was vaguely familiar but didn't seem to represent anything identifiable. It was like geometrical figures with rounded extremities and a line resembling a thunderbolt bending upward. Adam had seen that glyph before, in Hannibal's and Will's study. What was happening?

Alicia's eyes jumped back and forth between him and the glyph, huge with distress.

"Adam... you were wearing Bokrug's emblem only seconds ago. But this glyph... it has nothing to do with Bokrug, it's Nug's symbol! I have only seen it in a very old book once. No one have heard of The Twin Blasphemies since hundreds of years! What's going on?!"

He looked again at the newly formed glyph on his necklace, and at the monstrous shape of his moving partner.

“I... I am not sure. Nigel's brother possess a little statue of Yeb and Nug in his study. And he seems to know a lot about them. The Twin gods...” He raised his head sharply to Alicia who was biting her lower lip in a nervous gesture. “I don't know what Nigel is called, but if this symbol is Nug's glyph, then I think that Hannibal and Nigel are Yeb and Nug.”

Alicia had a look of utter disbelief on her face. “By the gods Adam, this is even worse than I thought! Yeb and Nug are known to be among the most powerful and cunning of all of them! There is a half translated text that tends to suggest that they may be Elder Gods and not Great Old Ones, placing them at the very top of the pantheon!” She saw Adam shivered, looking as

lost as she felt. “If that's true, then it seems like they managed to trick Kyro during all this time.”

She grabbed Adam by his shoulders as another powerful wave came running down at them, making Adam coughed as they fought to stay upright. “Do you think that he came to rescue you because he loves you? They are not capable of love Adam, I told you that! They don't take humans as lovers, they don't even develop friendship with them! They haven't mate with humans since aeons. They prefer to use us as slaves, servants or just preys good enough to be killed and eaten! Nug lied to you if he made you believe that he cared about you."

Adam shook his head violently, a suffocating pressure in his chest. "That's not true, you don't know the way he looks at me! He came to save me, he is not a liar!"

They heard a horrific human cry close to them and looked sideways where the woman who had threatened Adam with the dagger, hovered above the water, a few meters from them. She had that same weapon in her hand, her movement frozen as Nigel stood right behind her, like the perfect predator he was. Her body was impaled by claws in her abdomen and surprisingly dangerous tendrils in her shoulders, piercing skin, bones and muscles in a clean cut from back to front. Her body was painted in red and her face contorted in a grimace of immense agony. She was still alive as Nigel came to stand directly against her broken body. He didn't look at Adam as he opened his mouth and bit the side of her neck and shoulder. His fangs easily tore her upper body opened as she choked on her blood. He pressed his jaw firmly into her flesh and with a sickening noise, beheaded her in a spattering of red gore that reached Adam and Alicia.

Both humans stood petrified by the violent death of the worshipper as Nigel licked the blood from his mouth and swallowed something, sending a terrifying chill in Adam who looked at Nigel with fear.

The sea creature finally raised his head in his direction and approached him slowly. Alicia reacted before he could and came to stand right between them, preventing Nigel to reach Adam.

“I won't let you take him away Nug!” she said boldly at him with fire in her dark eyes. “Fight your battle and leave him alone!” Despite her courage she was trembling from head to toes.

Nigel squinted at her in obvious warning, baring his still red pointed teeth. Seeing the danger in his posture, Adam took a step with a raised hand. “Wait Nigel, don't harm her please, she is not –”

He didn't get to finish his sentence as a shadow appeared above them out of thin air, followed by a mighty roar from Hannibal who had lost track of Kyro for half a second. The evil god had a boned-like sword in his deformed paw and was aiming at Adam with a vicious sneer.

“Die you disgusting vermin!”

Alicia grabbed Adam's hand hastily and he felt the little stone pressed against their joined palms, while Nigel and Hannibal blocked Kyro's attack in perfect synchronization.

Feeling like his soul was being sucked from his body, Adam had just enough time before he disappeared to see his partner, covered in thick black blood, holding between his tail Kyro's inhuman body. Hannibal mirrored Nigel's posture at the other side. Their tails coiled around their prey like a deadly snare, Nigel's scales and fins grinding against Hannibal's furs and bones. Adam hazily saw them as the Dioscuri, the constellation of the Twins, fighting among the stars like one united entity.

Chapter End Notes

Here is a little drawing of the glyph on Adam's necklace according to what I found about Nug in Lovecraft lore. Keep in mind that I have adapted the myth for the purpose of the story.
The first glyph, the one with the lizard can be found on internet if you search for Bokrug.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Warnings: None! But lots of explanations coming. I hope it will be understandable, English is not my own language and this part was a bit tricky.

Sorry for the delay <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dark walls and columns covered with a glossy lay of beryl bio-luminescence that looked like everything was made of blue marble. The long corridor ahead of them, filled with geometrical symbols and glyph looked surreal. But the most upsetting of it all was the feeling of walking in a submerged building, without the crushing weigh of the water, or the suffocating sensation of drowning.

They raised their hands above their head, testing their range of movements. The wall of water around them only permitted a slow progression, but they could walk as freely as they could breath. They touched their clothes and skin in shock. It felt like some kind of magic was surrounded them, preventing the water from touching them.

Adam was so exhausted by all that happened that he barely mentioned the oddity to Alicia, who was just as tired as he was, walking ahead of him painfully, while looking around in awe. He stopped moving to look at her. A strong part of him wished he had been teleported back to California, in the safety of his flat. It might not have made him happy, but it was the most reasonable thought at the moment.

He wanted to say “I want to go back home and forget everything.” But instead he heard himself whispered, “where are we?"

"We should be in Westminster at the central quarter of Wilmarth where I wanted to teleport us." She showed him the little black stone still clapped in her hand. It looked like black obsidian. "We have a lot of those crystals at the foundation. They are not from this world but they are normally safe to use. You just have to think of the exact place you want to go. Seems like there are some loopholes I weren't aware of. I don't really know where we are but I have a guess," she added, eyeing a mural carving depicting amphibian-like creatures. "We might just be in R'lyeh, the legendary city beneath the Atlantic Ocean. I need to wait for the stone to recharge and I will take us out of here.”

She eyed the necklace around Adam's neck dubiously and he realized that he was once once again clutching it in his palm without meaning to. Even after what happened he was still searching for Nigel for reassurance. “I hope Nigel is fine,” he said frowning, more to himself than to Alicia who grimaced at the name.

“Are you kidding me Adam, we are talking about the most powerful beings of this damn universe, of course he will be fine! Kyro was already defeated from the moment he wrongly thought that your Nigel was someone else.” She chastised herself by shaking her head and making an irritated noise. "Anyway, I don't care what happened to him, whatever he called himself those days, and neither should you.”

Crossing rooms that were more and more saturated with corals and dense aquatic vegetation, they progressed along corridors until they reached a bigger room, busting with life. Colourful fish of strange shape, jellyfish, sea cucumbers and giant crustaceans swam all around them, uncaring of their presence. At least there didn't seem to be any big predators in sight.

Tired and hungry, they decided to shorten their exploration, by sitting down on a rocky edge littered by sea anemones while they waited for the crystal to replenish its power.

There was something with this place that made Adam feel sad. He raised his head to truly look around them, trying to shake the fog from his mind. They were sitting in the middle of a ruin. The building around them had collapsed on itself. The ground was broken in several places and a few columns laid on their side. Sea weeds and corals had grown on the fallen stones, covering most of their surface as if the place had been abandoned for a very long time. The architecture resembled one of an ancient Greek palace. Half of the ceiling was gone, opened to dark water above them where not a single ray of daylight was coming through.

Bio-luminescent organisms were in such an abundance that they illuminated the whole area, soothing their mind with flashes of light, green and blue sparkles, and glowing bodies. They were all creatures of wonder, showing great mechanism of adaptation to survive the darkness and hostility of the deep ocean.

This is Nigel's home , thought Adam. *His realm is in the night sky of the ocean, sparkling like stars.*

"Like magic," he said out loud, meaning both the spectacle around them and the disturbing fact that they seemed unaffected by their environment.

A passing shoal of Bigeye tunas parted ahead of them as newcomers approached their sitting place. A gasp escaped Alicia next to him but he was too focused on the otherworldly beings swimming in their direction to look at her.

Fish-like creatures with a humanoid form and a narrow and smooth amphibian face were gazing coldly at them. There were a dozen individuals, with skin from dusty grey to light green, flat and slitted nose, very sharp teeth and webbed paws. They had small yellow eyes with vertical pupils made to see in the deep.

Adam jumped when a hand grabbed his arm. His companion was looking at the approaching creatures, mouth open. "Adam," she said in a whisper almost too low to hear, "I think those creatures are Deep Ones. I heard they had all disappeared during a giant purge."

They stopped a few feet from them, their frozen expression was impossible to decipher. Adam wondered absently if they could even smile the way humans can with their small

mouths. Long fins were covering the whole plane of their back, from the top of their head to the very tip of their tail. Even if they were a little different from Nigel's monstrous form, they hold the same dangerous grace and physical strength. Their long and muscular limbs were definitely not made to hunt small fish.

He barely dared to move, not wanting to show any sign of either weakness or threat. “Are they normally friendly with humans?” he asked as quietly as he could, keeping his gaze on their webbed feet endowed with three toes looking very dinosaur-like.

“Depends on who is telling the story,” replied Alicia humourlessly, “but you have Nug's protection right? So they are probably here to bring you a sandwich and show you to the nearest exit point.” Her snort turned into a frightened noise when Adam stood and began to walk toward them. She tried too late to bring him back to her. “Adam! What are you doing? It was a joke, don't go to them!”

He didn't listened to her and approached them slowly, surprised at the steadiness of his voice when he opened his mouth against his better judgment. “Hello. My name is Adam Raki. Do you know where Nigel is?”

The one closer to him growled softly, inclining his head like a curious gesture.

The water rippled around them and he felt the coldness of it grazed his skin for the first time since they arrived here. He shivered in his wet clothes, feeling the renewed throbbing of his wounds when the salted liquid touched them.

The creatures parted slightly, facing each others, and went on their knees on the broken pavement, head bowed. Something marched in front of the kneeling figures, and Adam's blue eyes met emerald ones.

"Nigel," he said in disbelief, half expecting the alien god to be an illusion.

He stood frozen as the true form of his boyfriend came to stand in front of him, at reaching distance. Flashes of blood and pained cries erupted in his mind when he remembered the way Nigel had killed the woman who had threatened them. His body shook, but he didn't knew why. Was it fear? Excitement to finally be reunited with him? Or simply from mental and physical exhaustion? All three of them most probably.

He stared at a scaly chest, catching movements in his peripheral vision, and then he was enveloped in strong arms, holding him close but gently.

The embrace broke him out of his uncertainty and to his disbelief he began to cry, clinging tightly at Nigel's shoulders, saying his name again and again between laboured exhales. He forgot all the things he wanted to ask him as well as their audience, and just let himself get lost in the feeling of cold and wet skin, filling his lungs with the overwhelming scent of comfort.

Two webbed hands gently urged him to raise his head. A shudder ran through him as claws lightly rubbed through his hair and a pair of full and soft lips fell softly on his own before

diving lower to trail a path of sharp kisses along his jaw and neck, stopping only at the edge of Adam's clothes.

"My Star," a rumbling voice said sending bubbles into the water that tickled his ear, "I've missed you terribly. I'll never let you out of my sight again."

Nigel looked just the same as the first time he saw him in this form, on the beach under the strawberry moon. There was not a single wound on his inhuman body, as if the battle they had witnessed never happened.

His body was thoroughly checked by careful hands as displeased noises came from the creature each time he found any kind of injuries on Adam's skin. To the young man's surprise, each cut or abrasion on his arms and hands were licked cleaned, leaving a tickling sensation. While Nigel attended to the most serious wound on his head, Adam watched in muted awe as the cuts on his hands healed in frightening speed until there was just a little redness left.

“How...?” he asked, whimpering as his neck was assaulted again by lips and tongue in a nearly aggressive way that would most certainly leave their own marks.

Understanding came to him. It was the exact spot where Kyro had cut and licked him. Adam made a movement to ease the rough treatment, but Nigel's grip on him tightened in warning as he resumed his possessive touch, stopping only when he was sure that he had erased Kyro's scent and touch from Adam's neck.

“I am fucking full of surprises darling,” he said as an explanation, soothing the frown from Adam's brow with a careful claw.

A wet sound next to them made him realized two things. One, that the strange aquatic creatures were swimming away, and two, that a very taken aback Alicia was watching them, a look of distaste and shock on her face.

Nigel answered her unspoken displeasure by narrowing his eyes on her. He made a menacing move around Adam toward her, the atmosphere shifting to a dangerous level.

"Wait Nigel!" Adam shouted, grabbing Nigel around his muscular upper-arm, wincing slightly when his sensitive skin connected with a row of sharp fins.

Nigel's cold eyes shifted to him, but his tone was soft, too soft for Adam to mistake it for anything than another warning. “Careful Adam.” Those words could mean anything, but he didn't let his lack of understanding frightened him.

“Please don't hurt her. She has been kind to me and she was a prisoner just like I was.” His mouth opened in a silent gasp. “Oh and there was another prisoner with us, his name is Benjamin. Have you seen him Nigel? I think he was wounded.”

“I'm sorry my Star, there are no survivors. I saw a boy with a wound across his chest, I think he was the one you talk about. I could tell he was no fucking worshippers. He was dying, and his mind was completely fucked. I killed him, quick and painless.” His tone was flat when he said that, devoid of any emotion.

“But you use magic for many things, you can teleport yourself, you just healed me!” His voice was quavering as he felt his temper rose. Why Benjamin had to die when he was still alive.

“Adam I'm not using any kind of magic. Nothing about what I am is magical. Someone like you should definitively know the difference. Your wounds were superficial, and even if I could have done something, his mind was already gone. I did him a small mercy by ending it. I'm not a fucking hero darling, you are the only one that matters.”

Alicia was silent, several emotions danced in her dark eyes before settling again on Nigel, as if awaiting for some death sentence to fall on her head too. Adam took hold of Nigel's arm once again, more to ground himself than to attract the creature's attention whose eyes were still piercing his soul. “Alicia needs to go back to England. Can you help her with that? Please Nigel.”

His partner's lips turned down, irritation clear on his exotic features, but his eyes seemed to soften a bit if the shift of colour in his emerald eyes could be any indication of it. Then with a quick shift of his wrist he made the stone in Alicia's hand flared to life with a glowing black hue.

She looked down at it, her eyes as wide opened as her hand. “It was you,” her tone was accusatory, “you disrupted the crystal to teleport us here. I guess we should thank you for not being crushed and drown by thousands litres of salty water?” The last part sounded ironic and bitter.

“You should watch your mouth and get the fuck out of here human. Maybe I should have only protected Adam and let you die here.” Nigel showed his teeth in a snarl. “There was no fucking way I would let my darling set foot in that cursed organization of yours. Now leave, my indulgence is already running thin.”

She gasped at him and opened her mouth to say something back, but closed it again upon seeing Adam coming close to her.

“I am sorry Alicia, Nigel can have a bit of a temper. Thank you, I wish I could see you again but that seems very unlikely.”

“Think about what I told you Adam. You seem to have a kind heart and monsters like him eat those like you alive without an ounce of regret. I wish you would open your eyes on his true nature. We are not made to associate with them without spilling blood and shedding our humanity."

“And I wish you will open your own eyes,” said Adam kindly, aware of the meaning of that metaphor, "if shedding parts of what makes me human, as you put it, is going to allow me to be with him, I might just do it. It is really difficult, nothing really makes sense anymore, but I will be fine. If Nigel was as terrible as you said, he would not have helped you to go back to your home. He saved us.”

Nigel came closer, making Alicia recoiled from them as the otherworldly being encircled Adam's waist, kissing the top of his hair.

Tears came in her eyes without her permission, she had not realized until now how much she cared for Adam. “He is manipulating you, what you see as gestures of love is just a possessive way to show you that you belong to him. I don't want you to get hurt Adam.”

Emerald eyes settled on her once more, and when Nigel opened his mouth, *R'Lyehian words resonated around them.* Alicia seemed to understand them, as she listened patiently, and after a few seconds of silence, she answered him in the same language, looking a bit taken aback.

When the strange exchange was over, she gave Adam a small smile and disappeared and a flash of red gurgling light disturbing the water around them.

***

Adam woke up slowly, his body felt heavy against the soft bedding, his muscles were stiffed and aching. A kiss was pressed against the back of his neck, and several others right after as if the man holding him close couldn't stop himself.

Adam turned around, looking sleepily at the tenderness in Nigel's human eyes.

"Good morning my Star, how are you feeling?"

They had arrived back at Will's and Hannibal's house yesterday afternoon. Seeing Adam's exhaustion and dire need to sleep, Will had gently hugged him, whispering how happy he was to see that he was mostly unscathed despite what happened to him. Adam had wanted to ask many questions but his tired brain hadn't been able to formulate them. He had gently been showed to the kitchen were a light but replenished meal had been served to him.

Now, looking at Nigel after fourteen hours of sleep, he felt dizzy.

“I am fine Nigel. I just feel like I have awoken from a very disturbing dream.”

“Yeah I guess the whole thing must have been pretty terrifying for you darling. I'm sorry you had to pay for my dirty sheets.” He smiled at Adam, the same confidence as always, but there was a bit of sadness there, like hesitation.

“What happened Nigel? I am very confused. They called you Bokrug.” He tasted the name, and didn't liked the sound of it. “It is as if I don't really know you. How many names do you have?”

“How about a warm bath first little star? We should take it easy.”

They quickly showered first, Adam was very eager to wash the last days off his dry and itchy skin. He couldn't help himself to stare when Nigel disrobed completely in front of him with a light smirk playing on his lips. He had seen the man naked before when they were on the beach. But this felt different, more intimate. Nigel's frame and intense eyes were not the only intimidating things about him he realised as his eyes kept sliding to the impressive cock hanging half hard between his legs.

Adam would have preferred to have a serious talk before getting physically close to him the way they were before. The previous events kept replaying in front of his eyes, especially the

moment after the brothers arrived and killed everyone. But Nigel couldn't keep his hands away from him, kissing his now red lips with restrained desperation that the young man couldn't resist between moans and delighted sighs.

He was helped into a bathtub filled with lavender scented water that soothed his still aching body.

Lying between Nigel's legs with his head on his right shoulder, Adam was toying with his necklace, contemplating the glyph on the pendant.

“The necklace you gave me changed. Before it was like an abstract fish and now it is something else. What does it represent?”

Large hands caressed along his arms and settled on his own around the glyph. “Sorry I didn't told you about it before Adam. I knew Kyro was after me but I didn't thought those fucking bastards will try to kidnap you. How fucking stupid of me.”

He went on, kissing the side of Adam's face. “This symbol is mine, the glyph of Nug, representing my true self. The one carved on it before was just a ruse to make others believe I was someone else. If you read the myths written by humans you will find that Ittaqua and Yeb are two different beings, who share no connections. Same for Bokrug and Nug. And those stupid morons like Kyro thought exactly the same.” He sighed against his head. “It might not make any fucking sense for you darling but let's say that Hanni and I have been playing a game of deceit with them for as fucking long as I can remember. We got tired of the role we were given. Fighting against others like us who came to this world to take ownership, keeping the balance of time from collapsing, leading the cults worshipping us and helping the bloody humans to imprison our naughty brothers under the sea. It got tasteless, letting us as unsatisfied as we had ever been. So we decided humans were not worth the effort. We disappeared from each plan of existence, forging ourselves another identity and doing what pleases us without consequences. We became Ittaqua and Borkug in front of our brethren to protect our true identity – lonely mythological entities living in forests and seas to keep an eye on other creatures that we still wanted to protect – and we disguised ourselves as humans in front of your kind. It lasted for some times, until that freaking idiot you now know as Kyro decided to test my patience by asking me, or the false version of me, to join him in his great plan to enslave the world, treating me as his fucking servant. I'm a bastard but THIS is my fucking world, I couldn't let it happened. So I killed his spawns as a way to calm my nerves, and also to provoke him. Of course the fiend got a grudge on me. Hannibal and I knew then that we'll have to reveal our true identity sooner that we would have liked to restore some order. Kyro didn't had a chance. As a lonely Ittaqua or a lonely Borkug we are a bit disadvantaged, but together as Yeb and Nug, when we reveal our real power, no one can stop us."

Adam frowned slightly and began to toy nervously with Nigel's fingers. “But the non-human form that you and Hannibal have, are they really your true form or is it something you created to lure the others when you took a false identity?"

"No one has ever seen Yeb and Nug true forms darling, until yesterday when we came to save you. Will was the only one to know the truth. A very long time ago we appeared as immaterial beings. You'll probably freak out if I was showing it to you now. You wouldn't be

able to understand what you see with your human eyes. But maybe you could feel it. One day I'll show you. What you saw when we came to save you is our true material shapes. I guess it doesn't make any fucking sense to you but to make it short, we were always the same no matter what form we took. Only our name changed. Humans and even our own kind attach too much importance in names. They forgot our nature, where we really come from."

Pondering that, the young man thought about what Alicia had said to him.

“Have you killed people Nigel?" he inquired bluntly.

The answer came quicker than Adam expected and he almost missed it. “I have darling.” Nigel turned slightly to look at him, knowing where this was going.

“Why do you kill people? Alicia said your kind was eating us. Is it true?”

“Adam,” he groaned and breathed heavily, "I won't lie to you darling, I know how you hate it. Better to brace yourself it's not going to be pretty. I told you I wasn't a good man and if that's not a fucking understatement. I kill when I get angry and to protect my interest and my business, I kill to protect my kind against humans, I kill because I like it and also sometimes because of hunger."

There was a stunned silence and Nigel feared Adam will get up and disappear, shouting at him how horrible he was. But the young man stayed where he was. He exhaled a couple of times, shivered, exhaled again and decided on something to say in a flat tone.

“Are you going to hurt me too Nigel? Alicia said you were evil.”

Nigel left his reclining position and took hold of Adam's face. “Never darling. On the fucking contrary. I will not let anything else happened to you. I care about you Adam, more than I've ever cared about anyone beside Hannibal and Will. I can manipulate and deceive but that's the fucking truth. My kind is nor good nor evil. We don't feel exactly the way you do but we are not deprived of feelings.”

“Do you love me Nigel?” he dared to ask. He needed to know before he goes back to California.

“Adam, what I feel for you is much more than that. Of course I love you, but those words don't mean anything, they are just ambiguous and untrustworthy. I'd like to show it to you until fucking forever, how big my devotion for you is. I've only been with a human once, Gabi. She betrayed me with some American shit. They got what was coming for them. I never showed her my true self, she would never have understood it.”

“That is a lot to take Nigel.” Understanding that whoever Gaby was got probably killed by Nigel, Adam stood and got out of the tub, taking a tower to dry himself while heading to the bedroom.

“I need to talk to my chief, I have missed my plane and now I need to book a new ticket.”

Nigel stared at his retreating form, eyes blazing green as a crushing sound resonated in the room when his hands fended the blue porcelain.

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Adam did call his boss at the Observatory saying that he had been attacked by some men in the street during an evening and just came back from the hospital. It was almost the truth. He loaned Hannibal's tablet to book a new plane ticket, and found one which should depart in two days. He filled all the information, hovered the cursor on the confirmation button and froze.

That's what he wanted right? Return to his home, go back to his routines and the soft texture of his blue alpaca wool plaid. Go away from everything that happened the last two weeks and find normalcy again.

“Are you alright buddy?” came the familiar voice of his cousin, who was looking down at what he was doing. “You don't have to leave you know. We could help you to find a job here. I thought you might want to stay with Nigel now that you know the truth.”

The tablet fell from Adam's hands. His head dropped forward and he clutched his hair painfully between his fingers. A sob escaped his lips.

“I don't know what to do Will. I shouldn't want to stay with Nigel. He is a murderer, I don't like that, I don't like bad people.” Tears were running down his face. “B- but it hurts so much to think about leaving without him. I think I love him Will. I don't know what to think!”

Will took him in his arms, rocking his frame gently. “I know it's difficult Adam, it must be so confusing for you. But, I have never seen you so happy, so full of life. You may be the only one who can truly see Nigel and accept him the way he is. Maybe you should take some times to think about it. A lot has happened those last days.”

“I thought you didn't like him Will. Why didn't you told me what he was?" a muffled voice asked against Will's chest. “How did you found out about Hannibal?”

“I knew before you met that the two of you were connected in some way. Nigel felt it, as weird as it may sound. He felt you. When I realized what it could mean I was afraid for you, afraid you get hurt, afraid you would do something against your will. Nigel and I have a good relationship, even if it was rather difficult in the beginning. I was opposed to it to start with, but after some reflection and when I saw the way you talked about each other, I started to believe that you were made for him, and I think you could be happy with him.” He took Adam's hand. “There is something I want to show you.”

They went outside, walking from the back of the property toward the forest. The air was warm, a light breeze shook the scattered trees gently. Will turned to look at him, an apology on his face. “Something a little unsettling is going to happen, but don't worry it's normal, I am right here with you.”

The air around them became colder, the forest grew more dense with pines and spruces. A strong wind blew from the north.

“Will?”

“It's okay Adam, I know that place very well, trust me.”

After ten more minutes of walking straight among ferns they arrived at a secluded cabin hidden by very high trees that kept most of the daylight to reach through. The cabin was modest, built entirely in wood, resting on piles, surrounded by wooden beams leading to the second floor.

“Where are we?” asked Adam, looking around when Will opened the front door for him to enter.

The little house was lovely inside despite its rough appearance. The main room, opened on the kitchen was furnished with plush bench seats, a little coffee table and elegant wooden shelves. There was a little mezzanine upstairs where Adam could discern a large bed. The place was beautifully decorated with animal furs, antlers, candles, plants and books. It gave Adam a warm and welcoming feeling.

“Hannibal and I like to spend some times here when he has some important matters to take care of with his subjects, or simply when we need some quiet time. That forest is very special to him. Here he can be himself.”

“But are we not in Spain anymore?” asked Adam, feeling irritation flared in his guts. He was tired of being moved around the globe without his knowledge.

“No, we are in Norway, but the whole place is hidden from human eyes. There is some sort of temporal glitch at the back of our house in Spain to access it. Only us, Nigel and now you are allowed to use it.”

A drawing standing on one of the shelves stole Adam's attention, framed in golden colour. It pictured Hannibal and Will, hugging closely. They were not smiling but the way they looked intensely at each other was enough to convey their feelings. Two matching rings could be seen on their fingers, as well as a striking biting mark on the lower part of their neck. The details were very impressive and gave the models a vivid quality.

“Hannibal is such an arrogant prick”, said Will lightly, following Adam's eyes, “he wanted to freeze that moment in time as much as in his memory palace. The day of our mating. When I decided to stay with him until the rest of my life. I told him we could take a picture but he found the idea offending, preferring to draw it instead.”

The wall next to them was filled with drawings, most of them depicted Will in domestic situations, others showed Nigel in different shapes. One particularly moved Adam. It was a simple drawing, showing just the upper part of Nigel's body, in his monstrous form. The thin stroke gave his face a gentle expression, almost like a smile. But there was a fierce glint in his eyes, focused entirely on the viewer. It felt as if the model was alive and could easily free himself from the paper.

Adam swallowed down his emotions. “How is it, to live with Hannibal? Did you ever felt like you were too different from him?”

Will looked around the place fondly, fixing his gaze on the forest behind the window.

“We have a turbulent history. Full of blood and betrayal. But at the end, even if we are not from the same species and we are not really thinking alike, we understand each other. I have never felt more myself than when I am with him. He is a very dark and dangerous creature, and his darkness is reflecting on my own. You remember when I told you I was in prison?” He saw Adam nod in the corner of his eyes. “I went to prison because of him. And he helped me get out of it. He also killed someone who was very dear to me. I wanted to hate him. There was even several moments when I wished I could kill him. It was a long and difficult road to accept what he is. But at the end he was all I ever wanted. There were no others for me and there were no others for him. At least he was honest with himself, he never tried to reject his true nature. When I look around now, at all the memories we have in this place –” his gaze fell on each single object, his smile grew, “– I feel like this is where I was always meant to be. I can't imagine being separated from him. You understand Adam?”

Adam looked back at the drawing depicted Nigel. “I think I understand. I think I feel the same with Nigel. There are many things I don't like him doing like killing people, but I can be myself when I am with him. Many times it was like I was loosing the grasp on reality, I was so afraid and angry and nothing made any sense. Normally when it is like this I yell, I want to go home and forget about the day. And I thought it was the only thing I wanted to do. But I was wrong. It is as if I am following a new rhythm. This rhythm is a bit out of tune and unusual, and I feel like my heart is beating too fast and I can't breath. But instead of hurting in a bad way, it feels good. All the happy moments I had with Nigel, the anticipation of the next ones, the awareness of all the things I didn't knew before about our world, like when I first learned about the stars or when I saw the raccoons the first time. If I forget my fear I just feel so happy, like I can feel what it means to truly be alive.”

He smiled at Will. "It makes me a little afraid, but I don't want to lose that.”

His cousin hold him tightly, kissing the top of his hair. “You won't lose anything Adam. Just do what makes you happier. Don't be afraid. Trust Nigel to help you not getting lost.”

A powerful roar came from the forest, something Adam had heard before. Will grinned and walked toward the door. “I think it's time to properly introduce you to my husband, even if you have already seen him like this.”

They went outside in the direction of the noise. A dark shadow moved toward them like smoke, disturbing leaves and branches on its way. The air grew cold making Adam shivered. The immaterial form gathered itself to reveal a giant beast with huge antlers and claws, its white eyes fixated on them.

“Adam,” said Will proudly, approaching the Wendigo-like form, “this is my husband Hannibal, also called Yeb, king of the forest, guardian god of our world.”

Hannibal bent his body toward Will who kissed the side of his skull head, his right hand coming up to pet the soft mane around his neck.

They both looked expectantly at Adam who approached them slowly, less afraid than he expected to be upon meeting Hannibal in that form again. The young man raised a hand

boldly in front of the god, feeling the chilling air coming from its maw. A long and pointy tongue came out from between sharp fangs and leaked the offered palm, leaving a thick and sticky trail in its path.

Adam frown in disgust, earning a loud laugh from Will who got the same treatment on his face for his effort. Both cousins laughed and Adam gained enough confidence to gently touch the fur on Hannibal chest, marvelling at the soft texture between his fingers.

“Nigel told me that they had to protect the Earth many years ago and that they helped humans to imprison those who wanted to do terrible things to us and our world. But then they didn't wanted to do that anymore and they killed a lot of humans. You just said Hannibal is a guardian. I don't understand. A guarding is suppose to protect something.”

“Hmm, maybe we should take it from a different end. Nigel and Hannibal are often mistaken by humans as Great Old Ones, you have read that term in the book Nigel showed you yes? In truth they have nothing to do with them. Their parents if we can call them that, were among the most powerful of all the universe. They were Outer Gods, omniscient beings who knew everything and saw everything. They were the guardians of the universe, of time and space. Normally they don't pick up a side, they don't help us. But they also were a sort of gate between all the dimensions. Their offspring, the ones we know as Hannibal and Nigel, inherited the same power and the same purpose. They are immortal entities called the Elder Gods. Some would say they are the real gods worshipped by humans and other creatures since millenniums. As I have understood it, they mingled too much in our business, in humans business. And they got tired to fight endlessly against their own. But even if they withdrew from their main obligation they still protect our world and the balance of everything around us. Nigel doesn't like to see it that way, and he doesn't want to admit it, but he loves this world, and he doesn't want it to disappear. They don't guide or protect the human race directly, quite the contrary I would say. But we wouldn't be here anymore if not for them.”

Adam reflected on it during their walk back toward the house on the coast of Spain, changing from one location to another as easily as on their way in. He spent the rest of the day reading books about cosmic myths, trying to make sense of everything that was explained to him.

The next day, he found Nigel sitting on the beach, looking at the sunrise. The man was deep in thoughts, a cigarette resting nearly untouched and burned out between two fingers. Adam felt a weigh coming off his chest when he saw him, wanting strongly to feel the curves and hardness of his body against his own again.

Will told him during their breakfast that Nigel was a lonely creature just like Hannibal had been, and even for beings like them, loneliness can become unbearable. Nigel had his twin brother but their kind longed to find a mate to spend the rest of eternity with.

The cloudy sky turned pink and orange in front of the waking sun. The water felt welcoming when Adam walked at the edge of it, turning his back from the peaceful landscape to look at Nigel in front of him. “I read you were born on a star called Antares, and that you have a child name Cthulhu.”

Nigel smiled lightly at that, the cigarette he hold vanished from his fingers. “He is not my child the way you understand it. I didn't fuck anyone, I created him with cosmic matter. It's a bit like making a form with clay, and giving it life.”

“And he was living in R'lyeh with you under the ocean, the city where I was with Alicia when you found us?” Adam began to take all his clothes off until he stood in his blue bathing shorts in front of a very surprised Nigel.

“Yeah something like that,” he answered absently, standing in front of Adam and making a movement like he wanted to touch him without actually doing it.

“Nigel?” The man who was looking hungrily at his naked skin raised his head to meet Adam's eyes. “You said you will show me the city, R'lyeh. I would like to see it now. Is that okay?”

Nigel swallowed, seeing something different in the gorgeous eyes of his Star, something akin to resolve. The god's glyph was shinning proudly around Adam's neck, along with the bracelet he gave him.

“Darling, do you still want to go back to California?”

Adam's expression didn't changed. “I want to stay with you. I called my boss a few minutes ago to tell him I was not going back to work. I didn't want to lie so I just said I had a boyfriend and decided to stay in Spain with him. I have to talk to Beth and Harlan. They won't be happy about it, but today I don't want to hear what they think. Maybe tomorrow.”

Warm fingers grazed his face, tracing the line of his cheekbone and jaw reverently. Nigel looked at him in wonder, not quite believing that his little human was real. Then his eyes became more playful and he smirked at him like he did the first day they met on the beach.

“How about a little game my Star. The rules are simple. You're going to swim toward the red buoy you can see there,” he said indicating the floating object with his finger, "I'll give you a head start and I'll wim after you. If you reach it before I get you, I'll show you the city. If you lose and I catch you before you reach it, I'll take you down to my nest and do all kind of wicked things to you.”

A shiver ran through Adam's spine. He could read enough of Nigel's tone and expression to understand that the last part wasn't meant as a threat but as something sexual. He wanted to see what will happen if he looses but also if he wins. Maybe he could convince Nigel to do both.”

Instead of answering, Adam turned toward the ocean, walked in the water and began to swim toward the buoy, hissing when the cold water touched the upper part of his body. With the water splashing on his ears he couldn't hear any telling signs that Nigel was following after him, but he felt the water stirred under him, like a soft current. He didn't wanted to disappoint Nigel so he swam as fast as he could, closing his mind to focus only on the movements he learned.

Just as the pad of his middle finger touched the buoy, something heavy fell upon him, and all he could see was whirls of bubbles and shades of blue.

When his surrounding stopped moving, he opened his eyes, feeling a little light-headed and saw that he was now standing on the beige floor of a large underwater building. It was the same kind of place as the one Alicia and him had been teleported to two days earlier. But this one didn't seemed to be destroyed. Two rows of Doric columns stood on each side of him, and behind them, the two facing walls were covered in bas-relief of strange geometrical forms and scenes. About six meters in front of him was three sets of stairs leading to a huge throne decorated with corals. Two statues on a pedestal stood on each side of the first set of stairs, representing a fish-like creature holding a sphere with one hand and a torch with the other. An orange light was emanating from aquatic plants on the columns. A vast dome above the throne was opened on the ocean where Adam could see a band of small fish swimming above the building.

Marine creatures were looking at him from behind the columns, the same kind Alicia called Deep Ones. Adam had a feeling of deja-vu.

He looked at the swirling colours of the creatures around him, feeling himself getting lost in their majestic dance. There was someone behind him, he could suddenly feel them against his back. He wanted to turn to look at them, but he couldn't move, like some unwanted force was keeping him in place... cold non-human skin slid against his own... a sharp feeling against his naked arm shocked him, sliding slowly toward his hand.

It was exactly like in his nightmare several nights ago.

And then came the feeling of suffocating, like the water around him was invading his mouth, his lungs, crushing him down under its weight.

He tried to shout, his panic threatening to overwhelm him completely.

A melodic sound caressed his ear, like a song, the language sharp and guttural. He knew that voice, have always known it. He let himself fall against a strong abdomen, relaxing in the arms of his god. It's okay. Nothing bad will happen to him with Nigel by his side.

The melodic voice stopped and he felt soft lips against his temple, whispering something he could now understand.

"Welcome in Y'ha-nthlei my love, in my palace under the Pacific Ocean."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have all the smut!
Thank you to those still following the story, it means a lot to me.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, the summer has been busy!
Here comes the last chapter, I hope you will like it. Thanks to those who followed that weird little story, I had a great time writing it.

Warnings: SMUT (read the tags)

Adam gasped in awe, looking around them at the high buildings as Nigel guided him across the city.

Most of the edifices were opened to the surrounding ocean, showing geometrical facades and mosaics. The aquatic life was abundant here and colourful. Giant formations of corals and plants slithered against the white walls like flowering vines in Mediterranean cities. The forest of kelp at the borders of Y'ha-nthlei was sheltering fish and crustaceans he had never seen before. Different races of sea creatures were leaving there, mostly deep ones, obeying Nigel's orders who in turn protected them from other forms of life.

A clawed finger soothed a frown on Adam's brow carefully.

"I don't understand," the young man said, standing on a balcony against the towering form of his otherworldly companion, "when you found us after you defeated Kyro, we were in a broken room. There were old blocks of stone scattered everywhere. Were we not in the same city as this one?"

"No darling we were not." Nigel raised a hand and an orb appeared in front of them, disturbing the water as it enlarged to reveal another place at the other side, like a travelling portal. Nigel took him by the waist, bend his knees and swam toward the orb with a powerful jump.

A strange numbness passed through Adam's limbs as they arrived in another ocean, in front of fallen columns and demolished stairs and statues that felt familiar.

Nigel's deep voice startled him as he was lowered back down on his feet.

"Long time ago, some fucking humans found this part of our world, the city of R'lyeh. They tried to steal its treasures, to capture my people and domesticate the technology they found here. But of course they didn't succeed. So the bastards decided it was a threat that needed to be destroyed. They called it the horrifying city of the spawn of Cthulhu, of monstrous beasts that had to be killed, as if they were responsible for all the disasters of this world. So they did just that.” Adam felt the powerful muscles tense against his back, as a cold feeling filled the

pit of his stomach. “They fabricated their nuclear weapons, the fuckers from Wilmarth foundation as their lead, and they did what they are so very good at, eradicating what they don't understand, what they can't control."

"How about the city we came from?" Adam dared to ask, looking behind them at the still flickering orb, "was it destroyed too? Are you not afraid they will find it like they found this one?"

"Y'ha-nthlei is hidden from undeserving eyes for fucking forever,” Nigel answered as he hold Adam against him where the human could feel a rambling purr that sounded like a warning rather than a soothing gesture. “Humans know of its existence but not its precise location. If they come too close to it I will gladly feast on their pathetic cries as they beg for their lives. The slaughter that happened here will never happen again as long as I fucking rule over it."

“How is it possible to hide an entire city? I could see it just find.” He knew the words were useless as soon as they escaped his mouth but he couldn't stop himself from asking, as irrational as everything sounded.

"Adam darling, how is it possible that you can breath and move as if you were not underwater? How did you went from Spain to Hannibal's territory in the middle of a Scandinavian forest? Humans call it magic, but it's just a spatial manipulation that Hannibal and I are capable to do. Artefacts were made to try to replicate the same kind of power like the starstones you saw when you were captive. You can see the city because I allow it, just like Hannibal's allowed Will to take you to their nest."

Nigel broke their embrace, his lips were parted in a snarl as he looked down at the fragments of a shattered statue at their feet. Upon looking closer, Adam realized that they were not shattered stones, but shattered bones. The ground all around them was covered in it. Dark bones where no aquatic plants had grown, as if it had happened yesterday and not several decades ago.

"Humans greatest weakness that drives them to commit the unforgivable, is their vanity. They want a power they can't tame, want knowledge their brain can't even grasp. They worship us, kneel in front of us, when the mere idea of what we are and what we are capable of horrify them. They've killed thousands of creatures living in the deepest water, not because they were dangerous to them, but because they didn't understood what they were seeing. Everything that's not human, a carbon copy of it, is a fucking threat that needs to be eradicate. They cling jealously to this world as if it belongs to them by birth right. They are ungrateful pieces of shit, exhausting the richness provided to them, forgetting that they are only borrowing it. They call us monsters but look around you Adam. They destroy and overuse. I've seen the beauty and diversity of my oceans wavered and disappeared. There's never enough to quench their thirst of money and power. I left my realm to wander on solid ground, trying to prevent my rage against the human race to destroy every single one of them. And what a fucking surprise to see that wherever I went, it was the bloody same."

His cold gaze pierced Adam who wavered under the onslaught of rage and sadness coming from him.

"We've created your world darling, made life on it fucking possible, like we have in other universes. Your tales give us great titles like Destroyer of Worlds, Bringer of Chaos and other tons of bullshit. And we could do it. It would be our greatest achievement," he snorted mockingly, "bring a new extinction on Earth like we've done before, starting everything anew. But despite our nature, it wouldn't feel good to do it. Instead we're looking at you all from afar. We look and laugh at the way you struggle, eager to see if you'll be your own instrument of destruction."

Adam was silent, overwhelmed by the words uttered by his alien lover, who seemed to be more godlike by each passing minute. Nigel's eyes softened and he knelt in front of him.

"But sometimes, the human race can still surprise us. Something beautiful come unexpected. I thought I had seen everything my star, but I had to think again. I felt you before we even met. A bright and warm feeling in the coldness of my core that connected me back to this world. There was a soul on this planet, calling out, made entirely to belong to me."

Tears gathered in Adam's eyes as he was lifted up by his thighs and directed to encircle Nigel's broad waist with his legs. Tendrils coming from the upper part of Nigel's back enveloped the young man to secure his hold while the creature took them away from what was left of R'lyeh.

As Nigel's powerful form glided through the water with surprising elegance, Adam clang tightly to his neck, mindful of his elongated fins. He couldn't see where they were heading, the water rushed around them too quickly to keep his eyes open. They could have reached their destination faster, the same way they did to reach both cities, but the human had a suspicion that it was done on purpose, letting the excitement grew as they finally arrive, breaking the water surface.

Adam opened his eyes, expecting to see the sky above them, but instead he was looking up at the entrance of an underwater cave. The power permitted him to breath and move comfortably underwater seemed to disappear as soon as they emerged. Nigel walked them toward a little sandy ledge surrounded by dark rocks. He couldn't see any entrance to the cave except the pool of dark water where they came from. The air was warm, smelling of salt and a strange flowery perfume that seemed to come from the luminescent plants on the cavern walls.

"Where are we now Nigel?" he asked, trying to sever the embrace to get his footing back without success.

"In my nest my little star, I did promise you I will do wicked things to you if you lose," he purred cunningly at him.

Adam furrowed his brows, even if he was feeling thrilled by the implication of it. "But I didn't lose, I reached the buoy like you told me to."

"Hmm I caught you at the same time darling, and I never said I was playing fair."

He knelt on the sand, gathering Adam close as the young man straddled his thighs. The creature's wet and cold scales felt like an addictive exotic caress against his skin. He had

missed the sensation of their roughness, lessened by the thin layer of transparent liquid coated them. He looked up and saw love and devotion in those emerald eyes. There was a sharp but careful pressure along his spine where Nigel's claws were grazing the skin, sending shivers down to his groin.

"Adam, my star, you were born to be mine, to be my mate. I've never felt so attracted to a human being. And I'm not talking only about physical attraction. We found each others between the stars love, and I've been waiting for the moment when we will finally become one."

He felt Adam shuddered again against him, his trembling hands caressed the fins on his shoulders, making Nigel's skin tingle in pleasure.

"Mate with me Adam."

The young man's eyes sparkled with an emotion Nigel couldn't quite place. He didn't sensed any fear or repulsion from him, but there was apprehension there.

"By mating you mean sex?" Adam asked, looking down at Nigel's lap. "In this form? You said we were compatible but you didn't explained everything. I want to understand so I don't panic."

"Sorry darling we didn't found the time to really talk about it before things went out of control. Mating for us can mean several things. It's both the act of having sex and binding ourselves on a psychic plane with our partner. Once it's over you will be my mate, like my all time partner. A bond that last forever."

"Alicia told me that your kind don't take human mates, or at least not since a very long time."

"She was right darling, very few humans are worthy enough to become our mate, our equal. There are exceptions though. Will is one of them, being born to become my brother's mate, just like you are born to be mine. But there are risks when choosing a human mate, even one destined for us. I told you before, the human mind is fragile, not made to bear our alien and immaterial nature, driving some into madness and despair. But I've faith in you my star, I won't let you get lost. I will take care of you, protect you, give you the right tools so you can see at the other side."

A claw ran behind his ear, spreading goosebumps on his arms.

"I won't force you Adam if it's not something you want. I can't go against my own nature and a part of me wants to influence you. I could go crazy at the idea that you wouldn't be completely mine. I can't promise you that I will disappear from your life if you reject me, that I won't try again and again to win you up. But I'm not a rapist, not that kind of bastard. If you don't want to mate with me I won't force you."

"I know you won't Nigel, I trust you. I just want to know what to expect. It's a little overwhelming."

"Sorry my star am I talking too much? How about we skip the ranting and go directly to the practice? The only thing you have to do is relax and let me taking care of you. But I need to hear it first. If you're not ready yet I can take you in my human form."

Adam shook his head. "I want you in your real form, without human disguise."

He traced Nigel's face with the pad of his fingers, marvelling at his exotic features – his horizontal pupils, the glowing tendrils undulating around them, the softness of his hair and the rough edges of his jaw and cheekbones. He parted Nigel's lips with his thumb, revealing two rows of sharp fangs.

"I want to be yours. I feel like I already am. There is no other place I want to be than here with you. Show me," he whispered shakily against Nigel's mouth, "I want to lose myself in you."

He heard a low growl coming from Nigel's chest as sharp teeth opened against his finger to graze the skin. This close he could see a light blue liquid falling from a fang to run down his hand.

Before he could ponder about it he was suddenly carried over the edge of the water and laid down on his back on something soft that looks like seaweed. He was half way in the water to the middle of his chest.

His dangerous lover hovered above him, a predatory look on his face. He seemed bigger in that position, making place for himself between Adam's legs.

The young man felt his nervousness coming back. He still didn't knew what to expect and the entirety of Nigel's form was covered in sharp anatomical parts. He couldn't stop trembling despite his increasing arousal.

"Is it going to hurt? Mating?" he asked Nigel, fingers sinking in the algae under him.

Nigel's gaze softened a bit and he caressed Adam's side soothingly.

"No love, I'm not going to hurt you. It might be a bit uncomfortable at first but I will go very slowly and I promise to be gentle. Even if I want to I can't lose myself to my instincts, not this time. That's why I'll ask two things of you, like last time on the beach remember? Just to be on the safe side. If you want to stop or you start to panic, don't try to push me away or to run. If you do so I'll chase you and make you submit, like my own does when face to an uncooperative mate. Just talk to me, and I'll stop."

Adam heard the sound of a tearing fabric, realizing in his trance-like state that Nigel had reaped his bathing shorts apart.

"And the last thing my star, don't try to take the control back from me. Trust that I know what to do. If you don't like something, just tell me. Okay?"

Adam nodded, understanding the dominant nature of his partner. He was going to be eaten alive by this sea god, and the thought sent a spike of lust through his lower body, filling his

cock.

Nigel's form glowed along his fins and at the tip of his tendrils, green luminescent light reflecting on the walls of the dim cavern. His emerald eyes were also shining, and Adam couldn't look away from them, captivated. Nigel was using subterfuges to attract his mate. *A bit like a lanternfish* thought Adam. A very big and very dangerous lanternfish.

It was unfamiliar and unsettling, and Adam wanted to feel more of it.

He raised his hands, exploring the scales along Nigel's torso and the sharp protuberances along his ribs and hips. He didn't have a belly button. The scales became lighter in colour and softer as he approached the area under the hard muscles of his belly.

The creature lifted his lower body toward Adam's hands, encouraging his lover to explore the area between his legs.

Adam found a long slit there, along his pelvic, hiding between very flexible scales. He grazed it with the pad of two fingers and felt a wetness, but not the same wetness covering the rest of his body. This one was more sticky and thick.

The fingers stopped as Adam froze, not sure how to proceed from here. He opened his mouth to ask but Nigel beat him to it, pushing gently on his hand to urge him on.

His middle and index fingers went inside the surprisingly cold fold to the first knuckle until their progression got stopped by something hard pushing slowly against them. Adam grabbed the appendage gently, making it swell as he could see it coming out of the slit and along Nigel's stomach.

Nigel had a retractable cock, pink with soft skin, tapered toward the rounded tip. It was huge, already longer and thicker than any cock Adam had seen in his porno films. And it didn't seemed to be completely out of Nigel's body yet.

The creature shuddered and growled softly when Adam caressed the strange appendage, feeling overwhelmed by its shape and size. At least it was not glowing, but there was a thick dark liquid gathering at the tip.

"You said you weren't strictly male or female," came Adam hoarse voice, stopping his exploration to look back at Nigel's face who smirked at him.

"I'm not. I don't have a gender, even if I took masculine traits. You could knock me up if I let you." He chuckled at his boy's startled expression, bending over him to apply a comforting pressure against his smaller frame. "There is more than one way in which we can fuck darling, but we won't explore them all now, don't worry. I just want to feel you around me love, if you are not put off by my little dick show."

Adam shook his head. "It's not little, you are very big. This is a bit strange but I am feeling very aroused."

His hard cock twitched between his legs but he made no movement to relieve it, not wanting to displease Nigel. He looked at the sharp claws next to his head and at the water surrounding their lower body.

"The water is not a very good lubricant, we should get out of it if you want to penetrate me. And I need to use my fingers first I think."

Nigel covered more of his body with his own, careful not to hurt him under his weight. Their forehead touched, breath mingling as he spoke. "You remember what I told you darling? Don't think of the how, just let yourself feel good. I promised I won't hurt you."

Cold lips descended on Adam, massaging his own slowly, letting him used to the feeling before they became more demanding and a long and black tongue invaded his mouth. He could feel Nigel holding back despite his growing lust, exploring his mouth cautiously without cutting the sensitive skin with his fangs. The taste invading Adam's mouth was strange, different from what he had felt before while kissing Nigel. There was something sweet in Nigel's saliva that tingled on his tongue and inside his lips.

Nigel broke the kiss with a hiss and slid in the water, his head disappearing under the wet surface. Adam jumped, feeling his thighs being spread and raised as something soft probed between his cheeks.

The creature licked his hole slowly, applying more pressure with each drag of his tongue against the wrinkle skin without entering him. When he felt Adam's muscles beginning to relax he gently started to breach the tight channel with the tip of his tongue, spreading the quivering opening until it was ready to take more.

Adam moaned loudly, nerves on fire against the slow progression of Nigel's tongue that trust deeper into him. He felt the same tingling sensation around his entrance than the one he had felt on his tongue when Nigel had kissed him. The coaxing relaxed him fully, permitting Nigel to lick harder against his walls.

When another strangled sound came from Adam and he made half a movement to take himself in his hand, Nigel raised his head from between the human's legs to lick a long stripe from the base to the tip of his cock. Adam closed his eyes, arching his back in pleasure. Nigel was not even in him yet and it felt already too much.

His lover took advantage of the movement, encircling his chest with his long tail to turn him over unto his belly. Adam tried to support his weight on his hands and knees but a webbed hand came to the small of his back to push him down in the water none too gently.

Thin tendrils slithered around his legs and hips to lift them, spreading them around Nigel's waist in an almost uncomfortable stretch. The powerful embrace prevented him from going anywhere and he shivered at the sharp pressures on his skin - Long fins touching his legs, claws gripping his waist and the tip of a stinger pressing against his right shoulder where Nigel's tail still enveloped him gently. His hands barely touched the ground. Like a puppet, his body responded to the skilful limbs holding him.

The young man gasped when he felt the hard shape of a large cock alongside his own. Nigel rocked his body slowly against him and they groaned together at the delightful feeling. The creature bent and nipped at the raised bones of his spine, soothing the ache with a kiss like a silent apology until he reached Adam's ear.

"Breath my star," was purred against him as he tried not to held his breath.

Nigel parted his ass-cheeks and his cock retracted to rest against his hole, oozing more liquid that wasn't washed away by the water. Adam tensed and try to focus on what would unmistakably come next. But his lover didn't let him, making him lose his concentration by licking hard at the back of his neck and biting suddenly on the delicate skin, drawing blood.

Adam whimpered and felt even more disoriented when, at the same time, the tip of Nigel's cock entered his ass slowly but steadily. Quite surprisingly, he didn't felt pain from the bite, just a slight burn where their bodies were joined.

The creature withdrew his fangs from the human's neck and licked the wound thoroughly, producing a growling sound that distorted his voice when he spoke again. "You are doing so well my mate, just relax. I have you."

His body felt strangely light, the tension loosened against Nigel's possessive hold. Adam thought absently that the liquid on his fangs might be some kind of venom. The cock inside him withdrew a little to trust deeper, making Adam winced at the sensation of fullness. Nigel stopped his progression and made a soothing sound, running his tongue on the flesh of his back.

When he felt Adam's walls relaxed around him he pushed his cock a little deeper. The creature was barely moving. His hips were still against Adam's ass while his slick cock continued to trust inside him, making the discomfort turned into sharp pleasure when the tip rubbed against the young man's prostate.

Nigel finally shitted as much of himself as he could in Adam's warmth, hugging his lover tightly against him as they moaned together. He gave them both a minute to adjust before he began a slow rhythm with long and deep trusts.

Closing his eyes to ground himself, Adam felt like he was loosing consciousness against the emotions assaulted him. His spatial landmarks were disappearing and for a moment it seemed that Nigel was teleporting them to another place. He was missing the feeling of his body, as if he could not touch, smell or hear any more. Something even more unsettling came, like a new awareness, a new sense that he had never used before or even knew he had. There was another presence next to him, comforting and powerful. He couldn't see it, but something flashed in his mind, an immaterial shape, floating around him like dust. It had shades of gold and green and a burning core like the Wreath Nebula. He knew that shape, it called to him with a song, the words making more sense now than they ever did before. He opened his mouth to call back, coming to his body as the name escaped his lips.

"Nigel." He took a deep breath like he had been underwater for a long time.

"I'm here my love. You felt me didn't you? You opened your mind and found me there, between your stars and my own."

They were still in the cave and Nigel was still inside him, but their position was different now. His long arms were supported Adam's back, keeping his head from falling under the water that was now completely surrounded them. The god was leaning against his torso, boring his green eyes into his own, trying to convey all the love he felt for his human mate as his trusts became less gentle and more desperate.

A strong and relentless pressure against his prostate made Adam moaned loudly. He grabbed the shoulders above him. "N- Nigel! It feels so good! I am going to come."

"Come around my cock darling. You are all fucking mine now."

Adam linked his ankles behind Nigel's back, taking him even deeper than he thought possible. He came with a cry between their bellies, baring his throat to Nigel's hungry eyes who groaned at the sight and buried his cock into the tightening channel.

The girth inside Adam pulsed, becoming thicker, intensifying his orgasm until he fell boneless and exhausted in Nigel's arms. There was an uncomfortable burning feeling around his entrance when Nigel's cock stilled after a few more powerful trusts, spilling inside him in several waves of come that seemed to never end.

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Waking up one hour later, Adam grimaced when he moved his legs, feeling sticky and sore between his cheeks.

He was lying on something that felt very soft between his fingers, like silk. A weigh was holding him down into a pile of fur, a very warm weigh with smooth skin and a hairy chest against his back.

“How are you feeling my star,” said the sleepy voice of his naked mate, having reverse back to his human form.

“Sore”, replied Adam with a raspy voice, trying to move his head around to look at Nigel, only to hiss in pain at the movement.

Protective hands were immediately supporting his neck, helping him to lie on his side. Two thumbs caressed the swelled skin around the wound at the back of his neck in a soothing gesture.

“Sorry darling, the pain will fade. It's already starting to heal. It'll scar nicely and show everyone that you are entirely mine."

Adam touched alongside Nigel's fingers, feeling the raised wound there.

“There was no pain when you bit me. I don't even remember falling asleep.”

“You were exhausted and overwhelmed by the new feelings darling. I took us further into my nest to wait for my knot to go down. My saliva has a soothing and analgesic component. I will lick the wound again in a moment, it will help.”

“Your knot? What does that mean?”

“When I transform my cock get a wide base that swells when I come to keep the juicy part inside my mate. So inside you darling. It's a breeding thing to facilitate procreation. I can't impregnate you but that doesn't mean my body won't try to.” He punctuated the last part by grinding his hard cock against Adam's ass who winced again. “I tried my best to keep your body open and pliant but discomfort was to be expecting. It'll be better with a little practice love.”

Without waiting for an answer from his sleepy mate, the alien god parted Adam's cheeks gently, and a warm tongue began to lick around the abuse rim, coating it with as much of his healing saliva as he could, tasting the remnant of his semen still leaking from Adam's ass.

The young man yelped at the unexpected touch, unsure if he wanted to move away or get closer.

“Nigel, wait. It hurts a bit and I feel sticky and disgusting. Can we take a shower before we have sex again?”

As soon as the words left his mouth, Adam found himself in the shower of his bedroom in Will's and Hannibal's home. He looked dumbfounded at his companion who turned the water on, checked the temperature and resumed his task, kneeling on the ceramic behind Adam.

The latter opened his mouth to argue again but Nigel was as good to manipulate Adam's body into pleasure as he was to manipulate space and time. The young man choked on his moans as he was once again spread opened by a careful tongue and patient fingers, their owner keeping a watchful eye on his reactions.

They ended in Adam's bed, where Nigel took him carefully, looking up at the open mouth of his mate as the human rode him unhurriedly, moaning Nigel's name like it was the lighthouse guiding him under the storm in the darkness.

Three months later

The heavy bag fell on the floor with a rolling sound of plastic waste.

“Twelve kilos just north of Punta Cana,” said a feminine voice with a heavy Spanish accent. “Javier is on his way with Forty-five kilos more. He also took some sample of the corals near Bavaro.”

Raising his head from the study he was reading, Adam smiled, fixing his gaze on the white t-shirt his co-worker was wearing where bold letters formed the name Green Star, with a logo

under it representing species of corals called Green Star Polyps.

“Thank you Carlotta. I am finishing the last panel for our exhibition, it will be about Caribbean's oceanic mangroves. I just need to add a few pictures. I will head home after, I am expected a call from my cousin.”

Carlotta looked over Adam's shoulder, squeaking excitedly. “I can't wait to present our exhibition, we have been working so hard on this. Say hi to Nigel from me. I will see you on Thursday.”

The black-haired middle age woman picked up the bag, carrying it toward the back of the local Adam had bought, south of Punta Cana.

A few minutes later he left the building and walked toward the car waiting for him, readying himself for the long two hours drive toward their home along the north coast of the Dominican Republic. He felt instantly better when he climbed into the passenger seat, locking eyes with his partner's gorgeous features.

His greeting words got stuck as he was gripped by a strong hand at the back of his neck and thoroughly kissed by a very impatient god, who then proceeded to smell him noisily against the side of his face.

“Hello darling,” he heard him purred, “I've missed you terribly.”

He intertwined the fingers of his right hand with Adam's, keeping him close while he drove them away.

The young man saw his cousin's name flashing on the screen of his phone. He pushed the green button to answer the call, a familiar voice resonating against his ear.

“Hey Adam, how is it going? I heard from Hannibal that your association begins to be well-known all around the islands, that's great!”

“Hello Will. Yes I am very happy about it. Did he told you I decided to call it Green Star? I thought it will take longer but the other members are doing a wonderful job. We will have an exhibition on Thursday with FUNDEMAR about the importance of coral reefs' ecosystem for the conservation of the oceanic biodiversity. I wish you could come to see it.”

“Knowing Hannibal we might just be in the area at that moment. I will let you know. How's life on the island? Did you apply for that astronomer job?”

“Not yet. Nigel needs me with him all the time. He has been very possessive those last days,” Adam said, looking side-way at the unimpressed look Nigel sent him, squeezing his hand harder. "Otherwise the people here are very nice. I am still struggling a bit to adapt but I am getting better at Spanish.”

He heard Will chuckled at the first part. “I did told you mating season was approaching, he is going to be a real nuisance for the next couple of weeks before it gets better. Are you still

having headache and fever at night? I remember feeling the same several months after I mated with Hannibal. It will pass. Did you try to swim after you felt the change?"

"I did, it's amazing Will, I can breath underwater without needing Nigel's help! I have gills and I swim very fast. I can even see and hear much better than before when we are in deep water. Nigel mentioned something about living much longer than any other human being, but I don't know how to feel about it. Last time I couldn't reverse back and I got a panic attack. But I don't feel the pain any more."

"Yeah the whole thing is very weird but I am sure you will get use to it buddy. You know you can also come to visit whenever you want."

"I know Will, thank you. I will talk to you later."

"See you Adam, say hi from me to the grumpy fish next to you."

The line was out and the phone quickly tucked away before Nigel could grab it to reply some profanities back to Will, having heard the entire conversation.

"Am I a fucking possessive nuisance darling? You weren't saying that this morning when I made you beg my name so beautifully hm?"

"You are very possessive Nigel but I don't mind it," he said, looking at the palm trees at the side of the road. "Nigel?" he went on, still looking out of the window, "Do you remember when you came to save me after your battle with Kyro? You said something to Alicia before she went away." He waited for a nod before he finally asked what have been on his mind for some time. "What did you said to her?"

"I told her that I have always been yours, as much as you were mine," Nigel answered, smiling softly when he got his human's attention back. "That there was nothing I could do about it. We were meant to belong to each other. And like the bond I have with Hannibal, you are a part of me Adam. And that's why I will never hurt you. "

Blue eyes found the mark he had left on Nigel's neck a few weeks ago, when his companion had asked him to bite him. While doing so he had drunk a little of that strange black liquid coming from the wound. Since then, his body had undertook some slight change to accommodate Nigel's nature as his mate. The wound on his neck should have closed without leaving a scar but Nigel wanted it here, to match the one he gave Adam. Fortunately no one around them seemed to have noticed it apart from those who were not humans.

He kissed the back of Nigel's hand, beaming at the fond look he received from his partner.

"I love you Nigel."

There was a flash of fang and a warm feeling against his chest where the little glyph lied as guttural wording came from Nigel's mouth, making Adam shiver. The song that his lover sang to him in his dreams, even before they met, to call him home.

Ya yogfm'l, gokar'luh ot gn'th. Ot uaaahgof'n nug, uh'eogoth ot y'ha-nthlei. Ymg' mggoka'ai ya uln, ah ya yaor ng ymg' ephaimgsyha'h ah mguh'e ephaii

My star, treasure of the ocean. Mate of Nug, prince of Y'ha-nthlei. You heard my call, be mine and you will never be alone again.

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